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A *paralaukik* painting by a Jadu-*patua* from Binpur (Midnapore) depicting a Bhumij woman in the Afterworld. 19th Century. Size 21″×18″. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta.

THE RITUAL ART OF THE

BRATAS OF BENGAL

By

SUDHANSU KUMAR RAY

Jr. Field Officer, Crafts Museum,
All India Handicrafts Board,
New Delhi.

●

With a Foreword by

M. S. RANDHAWA, D.Sc., I.C.S.

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Frontispiece:

Part of a scroll painting (late 19th Century) from Amdabad (Midnapore) depicting the "Lady on the Lotus". Courtesy —Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Size 24″ × 14″.

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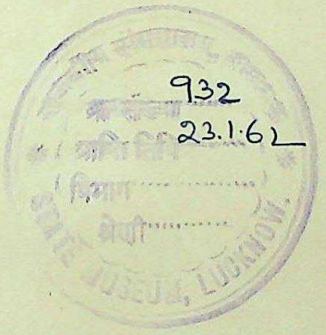

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TO THE MEMORY OF

ABANINDRANATH TAGORE

whose profound love for and understanding of Bengal's ancient indigenous traditions in the *brata* religion and art found expression in a monumental work, published fifty years ago, which brought to the world a fresh evaluation of India's long-neglected cultural heritage.

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HOMAGE

This book will stand as an homage to Ruth Reeves, a Fulbright scholar in India from the School of Painting and Sculpture, Columbia University, whose enthusiastic encouragement and practical help during every phase of its production have demonstrated her selfless dedication to the vital objectives implicit in her country's Fulbright programme, *viz.*, that world friendship and understanding largely depend upon world-wide dissemination of the authentic cultural achievements of the peoples of the world. Her generosity has preponderantly underwritten the publication.

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Dr. M. S. Randhawa, I.C.S., has kindly condescended to write an illuminating "Foreword" to this book. His deep erudition and love for art and artists are well-known. I am grateful to him. The majority of the objects illustrated in this book are in the Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta, and I wish to thank Prof. D. P. Ghosh, its Curator, for his kind permission to reproduce them.

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To my wife Kalyani Ray, and son Suryansu Kumar Ray and pupil Manoranjan Ray Chaudhury, my obligations are too many to be recorded here.

S. K. Ray

Dated : July 20, 1960.
Crafts Museum,
Thapar House, 124-Janpath,
New Delhi-1

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FOREWORD

by

M. S. Randhawa

Religion in India, or as it may more appropriately be called, Indian way of life, is a blend of primeval emotions, chastened and beautified in the course of a long spiritual growth, and the values and traditions born of historical forces and the genius of the people. To an outsider accustomed to thinking India as a land of innumerable races and beliefs, the basic homogeneity of its culture appears most surprising. The explanation of this unity lies in the fact that creative activity here has always been preoccupied with the primordial forces operating behind the facade of actuality instead of expressing the personal moods of the thinker or the artist or displaying his technical virtuosity. The country's folk culture is an appropriate symbolical revelation of that invisible realm of the supernatural which the unsophisticated masses recognize as the prime reality behind the visible world. The Brata art of Bengal, which is described in this book, is typical of the folk traditions prevalent in India to this day. In spirit and content, the Bratas are magico-religious rites performed by women-folk in Bengal for invoking the blessings of various deities to secure domestic happiness and the welfare of dear ones. They reflect the social and religious beliefs of an area which is among the richest in ancient traditions in India. As such, they deserve close study and a wide recognition.

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The author of this interesting book has attempted a scholarly treatment of Brata traditions and the associated arts. The striking similarities between the old Egyptian culture and the folk culture of Bengal to which he has drawn pointed attention are particularly thought-provoking and may perhaps be due to parallel development. The Brata art has been analysed in considerable detail from the technical and aesthetic viewpoints, and the socio-religious significance of this art has been brought out with considerable clarity. The book, I am sure, would attract wide notice and prove to be valuable reference material on the subject.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF *BRATA* ART

Well—let me dive into the depths of time
And bring from out the ages that have rolled
A few small fragments of those wrecks sublime
Which human eye may never more behold.

—H. L. V. DEROZIO (1809-31)

"NO archaeologist is well equipped for his work unless he has some knowledge of the modern science of Anthropology, for both Archaeology and Anthropology are the study of Man. The only difference is that the anthropologist studies Man in the present, the archaeologist studies Man in the past. But no anthropologist can afford to ignore the past, for tradition plays a large part in the culture of every country, and every archaeologist should know and understand the people of the country where he works or he will fail to interpret his finds. Both should know the field in which they work in all seasons, in heat or cold, in wet or dry, for then only will they be saved from making egregious mistakes."[1] In course of archaeological excavations conducted at Mohenjo-daro during the year 1935-36 a terra-cotta human head with an unusually elongated neck was discovered. It could not be identified by the archaeologists and was set aside as an "uncertain species".[2] Had an archaeologist visited the "artisan's dwelling" of a village in the district of Midnapore, or Nadia, he could have at once identified this peculiar terra-cotta head with the "head-pendulum" of a modern moving earthen doll. He could have understood also the purpose of a small bore through the elongated neck, which an artisan of Mohenjo-daro had made to suspend the head by means of a thread attached to the hollow shoulder of the separately made body-part of a doll so that it might oscillate to and fro just as a Bengali moving doll does now. The mechanism of this tiny part of a child's doll not only reveals to us the long history of the tradition of moving dolls in India, but also illustrates the picture of a prehistoric society of Man that permitted its children to play with a doll, the head of which, when pushed, oscillated to create amusement and joy for the beholder five thousand years ago !

Again, from the late Mahamahopadhyaya Haraprasad Sastri down to Professor Asutosh Bhattacharyya, it took us three generations to know finally

[1] Murray—*The Splendour That Was Egypt* (London 1954), pp. xxi—xxii.

[2] Mackay—*Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro*, Pl. LXXXI, fig. 2 and p. 294.

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that Dharma-*puja* belongs to the Sun cult.[3] Had an anthropologist visited the "artisan's dwelling" of a village in the district of Birbhum he could have seen a *patua* unfolding his scroll painting illustrated with a full-sized portrait of Dharma-raja Zama and singing aloud the explanatory verses traditionally preserved in it—"Zama, son of the Sun !"[4]

If an anthropologist indiscriminately identifies every ritual brass pot, or votive earthen vase of Bengal, with an object of fertility cult simply because of its egg-shaped bottom, or the middle, he will expose himself to an "egregious mistake". As a matter of fact, the egg-shaped bottom of a ritual vase of Bengal is an "ideographic sign" of femininity of a ruler-goddess which has been emphasized in her pottery-image due to administrative reasons. Do we really worship two divine generative organs of Shiva and Parvati carved in a stone *linga-patta* ? Is it a phallic emblem, or does it signify something else ? It is neither necessary to identify every long-shaped object with a phallus nor desirable to associate any phallic emblem with the divine worship of Lord Shiva. It will be quite reasonable if we re-examine the implications of the so-called *linga* worship in India on the basis of its functions. Is Sitala really a presiding deity over the disease of small-pox, or is she a pre-equine-period queen-goddess who, as a part of her royal duty, did serve her subjects with medical aids against small-pox ? Above all, we have set a fashion to identify every female figure holding a child in her arms with the universal Mother-goddess. Being orientals, we are conventionally taught to revere every woman as "mother" and it is still very difficult for us to imagine God as male ; because the popular mind happily recognizes only a supreme Mother so far as the biological creation of human beings is concerned. In spite of that, though all women represent a common "motherhood", there is a difference between the mother of a Kalicharan (Tom) and the mother of a Shyamacharan (Dick) ; not only the difference lies in their names, but in their individual personalities—an inherent quality. And an anthropologist or an archaeologist will again commit an "egregious mistake" if he identifies every image of "mother and child", modern or old, with the universal Mother-goddess, or Devi, the supreme goddess of the Hindu pantheon. There is a difference—which may be called a difference in biological species—between a figurine of the Snake-mother from Bankura and a figurine of the Bird-mother from Mymensingh ! The interpretations based on misunderstood

[3] A. Bhattacharyya—"Dharma Worship in West Bengal", Census (1951) Report : *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal* (Calcutta, 1953), edited by A. Mitra, pp. 351-360.

[4] G. S. Dutt—*Patua Sangit* (University of Calcutta, 1939), Zama-*pata* songs, pp. 15, 68.

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tradition neither equip us with the history of the country nor help us in understanding the soul of the people.

"To the archaeologist the objects which he finds in the course of his excavations or which he studies in museums are of little value in themselves ; they are merely the means by which he arrives at a knowledge of the past. Statues of bronze or marble, treasures of gold and precious stones, pompous inscriptions of deeds of kings, conventional hymns or prayers to the gods, are not necessarily important in understanding the soul of a people. Over and over again some small object from an artisan's dwelling, a child's toy, a piece of work from a woman's hand, will illuminate the past with a vividness denied to a statue, a jewel, or an inscription."[5] The living tradition of this "small object"—an earthen vase, a clay-toy, a painting (*pata*), a bamboo basket, or a drawing (*alpana*) from a woman's hand—vertically connects Man of the past with Man of the present. And its study enables a student to correlate horizontally the result of diggings of an archaeologist with the result of investigations of an anthropologist ; it finally serves him with a "structural understanding" of the subject of his inquiry.

The study of traditional arts and crafts, where they are fortunately still alive, should be taken up as an important scientific pursuit on the spot. As a matter of fact, the study of survivals of traditional arts and crafts had already begun to take shape in Bengal[6] during the first half of this century, a study which, it is hoped, will enable us to formulate a "new science"—a methodology for understanding the unknown and misunderstood periods of our ancient history. As Archaeology helps us to understand the past history of the country, this "Neology", or if I am permitted by the grammarians of the English language to term it as "Craftology", can also "illuminate the past with a vividness", provided the value of the traditional arts is properly assessed through the following threefold examination (*tribidha-pariksha*) : (1) The iconography (*pratima-lakshana*) of an object of art is a complement to (2) the designating terminology (*mantra*), or *vice versa*. (3) The rites (*acharan*), along with them, hold the art alive in a tradition that has been inaugurated, practised, and enjoyed by our ancestors.

Quite simply, if we pick up a doll, an image, or a *pata* (scroll painting) from an "artisan's dwelling", or purchase it from a temporary stall of a rural

[5] Murray—*The Splendour That Was Egypt* (London, 1954), p. xxi.

[6] Amongst the pioneers in this field of research the names of Dr. Abanindranath Tagore, Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, and Shri Guru Saday Dutt, loom large ; without their profound scholarship and rare awareness it would not have been possible for me to keep track of the lost tradition of the *brata* arts of Bengal.

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fair, or an urban curio shop, it would neither help us to understand the real values hidden behind the object nor save us from committing "egregious mistakes" in its interpretations. Unless we know these three (*tribidha*) aspects equally and completely of an art that has traditionally come down to us from the remotest antiquity, we will fail to enjoy its aesthetic values, to realize its cultural contributions to the development of our social (*samajik*) structures, and to note the history of the country recorded therein.

This small treatise is meant to be a cursory study in the vast field of wide ramifications of our indigenous arts and crafts connected with the *brata* religion. The relation between art and religion is a universal feature. And in the religion of *brata*, art is an indispensable means of communication between the devotees and the gods. We cannot dissociate it from the *mantras* (incantations), or *chhadas* (spells) and the rites of *brata*, because the drawings and the models are used here as a kind of "picture-writing" by the devotees, with a view to transmitting their thoughts through a visible medium complementary to the sound of the spell. They form the sacred "scriptures" of the *brata* religion. The arts, crafts and the stories connected with *brata*, when examined, reveal that the tradition of this religion has had its origin in the aboriginal totemism of the various autochthonous ethnic groups who had been occupying the country in ancient days. A syncretism amongst the local or regional forms of tribal worship gradually evolved the religion of *brata*, characteristic of which is its theriomorphism. *Bratas*, which directly or indirectly gave rise to the beginnings of all the folk-traditions of art now surviving in Bengal, naturally can explain the reasons for which we began to draw paintings and model sculptures. While explaining the significances of these survivals, I am reminded of the following guiding remarks of Sir Flinders Petrie regarding the Indus-valley script, which are equally applicable to the ideographic arts of *brata* of Bengal: "From the examples now given, it appears that these are certainly ideographic signs, such lie at the foundation of Egyptian, Sumerian, and Chinese writing, but at so early a stage that the forms can mostly be recognized. The importance of timber and forestry, of canals, of water supply, of transport wagons, and the hostels needed for trade and government service, all belong to conditions of life which are naturally the same in all ages of India." [7]

[7] *Ancient Egypt* (London), Part II, June 1932, pp. 39-40. The traditional arts and crafts of Bengal furnish, as we shall see, many rudimentary forms and motifs which can be found in their highly developed forms in ancient Egyptian, West Asian and Aegean arts. And it seems that an equally important civilization also flourished in the lower Gangetic-valley during the prehistoric period. It is very difficult to keep from comparing all these traditional forms and motifs of Bengal with those of ancient civilized world.

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The living traditions of the arts of Bengal as handed down to us from the remotest antiquity are imbued with many ancient forms and motifs which speak of their early beginning. Their antiquity goes back to a "Botanic Age" beyond the Ages of Iron and Bronze. As a matter of fact, a pre-metal "cane-bamboo-wood" age gave birth to many techniques and methods, many forms and motifs which continued up till now with modifications throughout the ages. It has been correctly noticed by G. S. Dutt, who pioneered the resuscitation of folk-arts in Bengal, ". . . that certain forms and motifs which are found in the living traditions of the folk-arts of Bengal at the present day furnished fairly convincing evidence in support of the view that the basic traditional culture of Bengal is a living and unbroken continuation of the pre-Aryan civilization."[8] And according to Dr. Coomaraswamy, "the folk-arts that survive in Bengal are directly descended from the arts of at least 5,000 years ago . . ."[9] Although Bengal is a region still almost wholly unknown from the viewpoint of pre-historic antiquities due to its natural luxuriance of vegetation that rendered any ruins of archaeological importance invisible, the age-old living traditions of art definitely have placed her on equal footing with the civilizations of the ancient world. We do not know whether "history begins at Sumer", Egypt or Crete, or altogether at a different place at Bengal in the Gangetic-valley. There is, perhaps, a new world of knowledge awaiting discovery in Bengal.

The savage mind works everywhere in the same way, and like all other primitive pioneers of arts of the world, the Bengalis also commenced their art traditions in a savage manner and, as a rule, magic played an important part in them. But it is a wonder that although we passed the incipient stages of our culture long ago, many of those traditions of magico-religious art still survive even to the present day. What our savage ancestors believed a few thousand years ago—although we do not consciously believe them now—are being preserved by us through repetitions. We have totally forgotten the original significance of those magical performances but we still continue to observe them under new interpretations suitable to our developed mind.[10] For instance, a "striking down" ceremony is now performed in the

[8] *The Modern Review* (Calcutta), February 1940, p. 201.

[9] Dr. A. K. Coomaraswamy, in a letter to Ajit Mookerjee dated June 29, 1939, Boston, U.S.A.

[10] In this respect we are like the ancient Egyptians. "The Egyptians of civilized days preserved the beliefs of their savage ancestors, who were in the same stage of culture as modern tribes of the Congo. Under the influence of foreigners the primitive views became modified as time went on, but in all essentials the Egyptians who lived under the Romans believed what their ancestors believed 5,000 years before." Hall—*GIGEC*, British Museum (London, 1930), p. 227.

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name of the "*brata* of evening lamp". What originated in sheer brutality of tribal battles, slaughter, and hatred, has now been transformed into an innocent festival of joy for a civilized people. We have left behind the poison and brought forward the nectar, not for us alone, but for all the people on earth to enjoy. Our traditions have passed through the sieve of time which automatically threw the poison out and preserved the nectar. On our way we discarded *Animals* and realized *God*.

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Bengal ! full is thy coffer with treasures untold.
These ignoring, (fool that I was,)
I wandered in an alien land, lustful of its wealth,
Taking, in an evil hour, a beggar's role.
Full many a day I passed, comforts-forsworn,
Sleepless, foodless, dedicating body and soul,
Absorbed in fruitless penance, hymning a muse false.
Unmindful of the lotus-groves, I dallied in the swamp of sedge.
Then spoke in a dream the deity of thy race,—
"My child ! Thy mother's treasury abounds in gems ;
Why then strayest thou here, a miserable tramp ?
Go back, thou ignorant boy ! go back home !"
. . . I obeyed, content ; in time I found
A mine blazing with gems . . .

—MICHAEL MADHUSUDAN DUTT (1824-73)

(Translated from Bengali by
Shri Umanath Bhattacharya.)

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CHAPTER I

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

THE actual area of the land in which the culture of Bengal, its arts, crafts, language, and religion flourish and their influences are felt, covers mountains and their foothills, tablelands, valleys, plains, deltas and other land-formations of different geological ages.[1] Originally, in the Eocene Age, the whole of the alluvial plain of Bengal was a bay or a gulf—an extension of the present Bay of Bengal, which had the Himalayas as its northern boundary. In course of time, the bay gave place to a foothills belt at the north that arose due to the orogenic movements of the Himalayas, and was ultimately filled up with loads of silt constantly brought and deposited by the rivers Ganges and Brahmaputra.[2] Intersected by numerous rivers, channels, lakes, deep gorges and shallow swamps (*haors* and *bils*), the land of Bengal—a vast morass—arose out of the sea, being gradually "clotted" within the framework of the foothills belt of the Himalayas, and the Rajmahal, Khasi and the Garo hills. So far as the sequence of our cultural history is concerned, the alluvial

[1] The extent of undivided Bengal, excluding the States of Tripura, Cooch-Bihar (both have now merged with India) and Sikkim and the surface area covered by rivers and estuaries, is 77,521 sq. miles. It is bounded on the north by the Himalayas, on the south by the Bay of Bengal, on the east by Assam and on the west by Bihar and Orissa and is situated between 27.9 and 20.50 north latitudes and 86.35 and 93.30 east longitudes. The recent partition of Bengal, made on the distribution of two different communities, has no significance concerning the traditions of art. For a map showing the Bengali-speaking area refer to G. A. Grierson's *The Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. V, p. 10.

[2] The rivers Ganges and Brahmaputra are two descendants of a Tertiary drainage, sometimes referred to as Indo-Braham, which gradually replaced the Eocene gulf. For geological details refer to the paper on the "Geology of West Bengal" by D. R. S. Mehta, published in the Souvenir Volume of the 39th Session of the Indian Science Congress, 1952 (Calcutta).

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plain was sufficiently elevated during the Old Stone Age, ready for human habitation ; and in the New Stone Age, as the Tamluk excavations revealed, men had already begun to dwell in it.[3]

Bengal is still a boggy land, often subjected to tidal overflow. In the rainy season the whole alluvial plain is virtually converted into a sea. Rivers overflow in most of the areas; only the villages and towns situated on the artificial mounds and highlands remain above water. In many parts of the delta, travel from one village to another, or even from house to house, is maintained by means of a country-craft, called *salti*, or *donga*.

In early days, attempts to settle on this vast *rann* were frequently disrupted by heavy rains, floods, storms and earthquakes. It can readily be assumed that such cataclysmic disturbances brought many disappointments to these primitive pioneers. The Santals, a tribe living on the western upland of Bengal, whose ancestors were probably eye-witnesses of those events, significantly describe in their gene logical scrolls *Pilchu-hadam* (the grand-old-man) ordering the crocodile, tortoise, fish, frog, and all other aquatic animals to raise up earth from the bottom of the deep sea. They attempted many a time but in vain. In the end the lowly earthworm was successful in heaving earth out of the sea so that men might dwell permanently in it. In a *brata* called "*Zam-pukur* (the Pool of Zama)" our womenfolk depict the following scene : a small tank is dug out and filled up with water, and on the bank of this miniature tank crocodile, tortoise, fish, etc., modelled in clay, are placed. In the centre of the tank a long pole mounted with a kite made of clay is installed. Full of ferocious marine animals and watered by rivers, lakes and marshes, the true geographical picture of ancient Bengal is thus correctly presented by our womenfolk ! It manifests that at last our ancient pioneers succeeded in placing

[3] *Indian Archaeology : A Review*, 1954-55, The Department of Archaeology, Govt. of India, New Delhi, p. 19.

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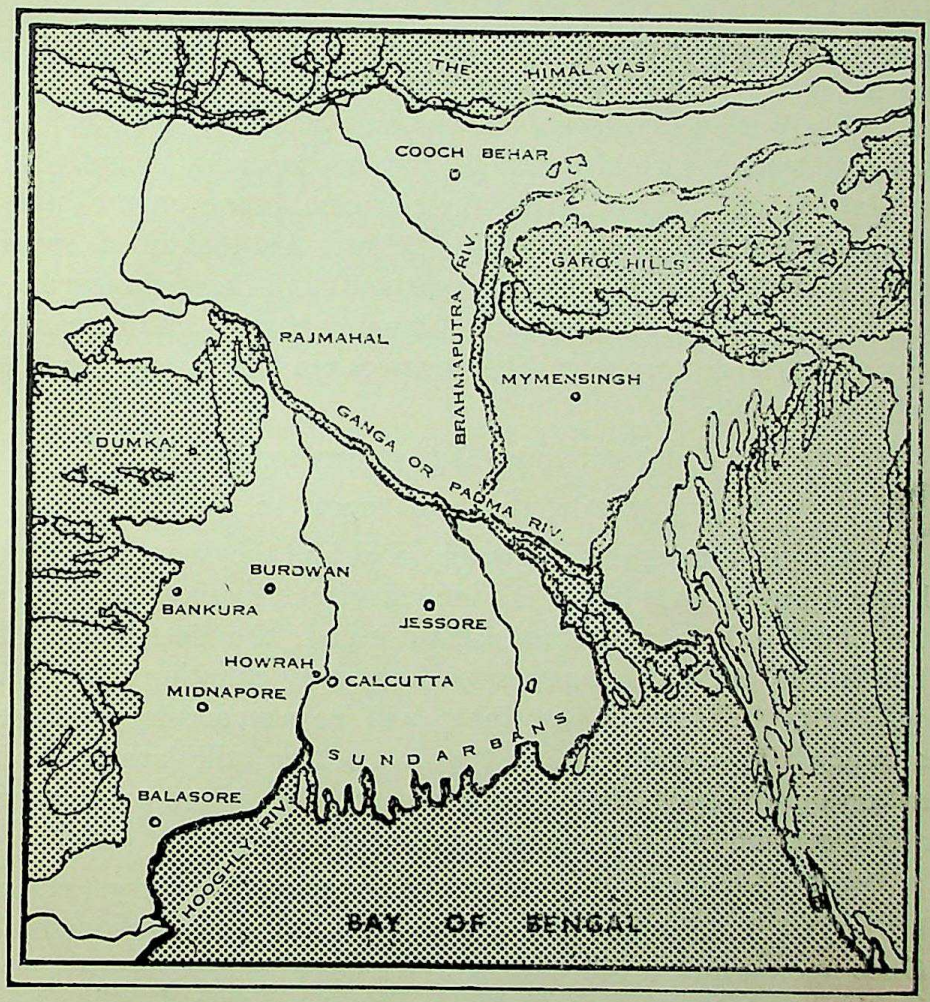
their insignia, or totem pole, as a mark of victory over that horrible watery chaos. The related spell complements the record:



Physical Map of Bengal (not to scale). The alluvial plains of Bengal have not been formed by the Ganges alone, but by the rivers Ganges and Brahmaputra jointly. Its surface levels are never the same, always varying from one place to another. Somewhere it is 6,500 ft. above the sea level, in another place it is 13 ft. only. Although the art traditions of the country have a fundamental unity all over, the characteristics of art; like the nature of the land, are never the same in two places. For example, the pottery-images of Manasa are made and used at the various centres in Bengal, but the one made on the terraces of the desiccated uplands of Bankura characteristically differs from the one made in the succulent lowlands of Jessore.

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Where lush *Shushnis* and *Kalmis* play
(Onto the King Zama's sacred bay),
—The prince sports and birds die;
Let (lands rise and) the morass dry !

There is an interesting traditional ceremony recorded in another *brata*, which also reveals the unconscious memory of migrations of the tribes from their original home on the highlands towards the growing islands below. Lal-thakur, a small earthen doll, adorned with *mala* (garland) and *chandana* (sandal-paste) sails every year in a small dummy boat to cultivate and govern his island property. His devotees bid him farewell in the following spell :

O Lal ! sail today but return tomorrow;
Every year let thy boat repeat to row !

Lal-thakur departs in his tiny boat and the women return home from the river bank. An incised circle is then drawn in the courtyard to indicate a small island, the destination of Lal-thakur, and a ceremony is performed by chanting a magical spell. In the second year there will be a second larger circle around the first one ; the next year another still larger ; and so on upto five circles in the fifth year. The island grows year after year and brings fortune to Lal-thakur.[4]

Kshetra-*brata* records how the poor and hungry people became rich and were well-fed by cultivating the low marshes. Once upon a time a widow was driven out of the house by her brother and in despair she was wandering with her only child. They had no place to rest and had nothing to eat. One morning, while sitting under a tree in a forest, they met an old woman

[4] We know from *bratas* that many magical rites were performed before the River-god in the hope of raising up and enlarging the newly formed *chars* (sand-beds) so that the river or sea might not encroach upon the banks of those growing islands. This is a practice still observed in the districts of Jessore, Khulna, Barisal and in many other coastal districts of Bengal.

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who gave them a few grains of paddy. She instructed them to sow the seeds on the nearby marshy land. After a few days, the marsh yielded golden paddy in abundance for the poor widow and her son. The news that the low barren land had produced plentiful paddy reached the *zamindar* (landlord) of the village. He immediately sent for the widow and her son who had apparently accomplished the miracle and on their arrival at his house received them with great honour and pomp. He then arranged that his daughter should be married to the widow's son. He built a large seven-storeyed building near the new paddy lands, where the widow with her son and daughter-in-law lived happily ever after.[5]

Fig. 1. The goddess Lakshmi, reproduced from a wood-cut made in the year 1836 A.D. (After *Sahitya Parisad Patrika*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Calcutta, 1939).

That the delta brought fortune—the vast paddy lands—is revealed in our traditional arts. Lakshmi, or *Nakkhi*, the goddess of fortune, according to our mythology, emerged out of the sea. She is iconographically associated with paddy and is depicted in a variety of plastic media as standing, or seated, on a lotus emerging from the water. She is the "Lady on the Lotus (*Kamale-kamini*)", symbolizing the rise of the delta and bringing fortune in its wake (Fig. 1). A culture with new knowledge and philosophy also oriented in the delta. Saraswati, the goddess of learning and culture, is thus shown standing or seated on a swan swimming in a lake. And from this point in time, the new phase of Bengali culture—a riverine civilization revolving around the

[5] Asutosh Majumdar—*Meyeder Bratakatha* (Calcutta, 1958), pp. 19-24.

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maritime activities—commenced. The inhabitants of Bengal became masters of their own waters, master-builders of ships, and brave seafarers. A record of this period has been traditionally preserved in the baked earthen *saras* (Pl. VI) made by the potters of Dhaka. It is a convex plate, the rounded edge of which is framed with a raised rim, representing an island with an embankment around it. Painted on the convex surface is Lakshmi, the goddess of fortune, who is depicted standing on a *mayura-pankhi* (peacock-shaped) sea-going vessel on the "Lotus-lake". This multi-coloured ritual plate records not only the geographical feature of the delta, but also the sea-borne commerce and trade and the prosperity of the people of an age which can be termed as the *dwaipayana* (delta) period of our history and culture.

Originally palaeolithic savages, the Bengalis lived as nomadic hunters and food-gatherers on the upper mountainous parts of their present country.[6] Gradually, as the delta increased with the passage of time, by means of migration to the alluvial plains, they became an agriculturally and commercially advanced people. It is for this reason that their culture and, by this same token, their arts and crafts are fundamentally and functionally related to those of the aboriginal tribes living today on the hills around the new alluvial tracts. It is the inevitable result of

[6] Birbhanpur, a microlithic site in the district of Burdwan, was excavated by the Department of Archaeology, Govt. of India, in the years 1953-54 and 1956-57. The implements found here overlay a 5-ft. thick deposit of detrital laterite, which appeared to have been exposed to view at the end of the last pluviation of the Pleistocene Period. The implements, therefore, might belong to the beginning of the Holocene and be ten thousand years old. Their high antiquity was confirmed by the weathered red colour of sandy loam overlying them. Renewed excavation (1956-57) by Shri B. B. Lal at Birbhanpur, in continuation of previous work (1953-54), confirmed that the microlithic industry was not associated with any kind of pottery and might, therefore, be taken to belong to a pre-pottery culture. The tools unearthed here included : knife-blades, lunates, points, borers, burins, scrapers, arrow-heads and awls. These tools confirm the above assessment regarding the nature of occupations of the proto-Bengalis in the Holocene Period. *Ref. Indian Archaeology : A Review*, 1956-57, The Department of Archaeology, Govt. of India, New Delhi, p. 15.

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the accumulation of various primitive elements which, like their country itself, had been brought together and formed along with the deposited soils and silts washed down by the Ganges and Brahmaputra from the distant highlands.[7] It should be noted here that the present tribal population in Bengal extends upwards leaving the new alluvial tracts outside their sphere. A Santal, a Bhumij or their painter—a Jadu-*patua*—never comes down to the plains; and a Toto, a Garo or a Tipra remains significantly beyond the border of the delta, not accidentally but purely due to geographical reasons. We can say in the words of Herodotus, writing about the Egyptians, that they are those who "remained where they originally were . . . ; and, as the delta increased with the passage of time, many of them moved down into the new territory," whose descendants have now been designated conventionally as the Bengali people, race or nation. Thus the Himalayan-Fortress-People (Gaudiyas) from the north, the Born-of-Earths (Bhumijs) of Central India from the west, and the Sons-of-the-Brahmaputra-valley (Badam-puts) from the east—all contributed their mites to consolidate the delta culture giving birth to the *brata* arts of Bengal, which are among the great folk traditions of the world.[8]

[7] "An interesting evidence of Naga influence is found in the peculiar type of face-caskets *(mukh-dibba)* traditionally cast out by the metal workers of Vishnupur, Dhaka and Khagra. These *(mukh-dibbas)* are used for serving *pan* (betel) and are, therefore, typically Bengali in their use. Sometimes this type of casket has two ears on either side used for lifting or opening the lid. This face-motif is very strangely similar to the face-tattoo of Kaniyak Nagas of Assam. The linear incisions, the formal modelling, the conventional modelling of the hair, eyes and brows on the betel casket and the face-tattoo, point to a common origin ; and it is a matter of no small wonder that a horribly murderous face-tattoo should be prized as a formal design in a timid Bengali household. It is also significant that both the *mukh-dibba* and the Naga face-tattoo are mirrored in the *mundamala* (garland of skulls) of the head-hunting goddess Kali." Ray—"The Artisan Castes of West Bengal and their Crafts", Census (1951) Report : *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal*, edited by A. Mitra (Calcutta, 1953), p. 301 ; also *ref.* Pl. I, figs. 1 and 2.

[8] I am not an anthropologist, nor am I qualified to deal with Ethnology. For identification of the ethnic groups of Bengal I have, therefore, depended on folk-stories, legends, etc., that have come down to us mostly as oral traditions and are supported

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by craft traditions of my country and my people. The indigenous art of a country is an ethnographical record of the local people or race and their manners and customs. It automatically illustrates the very ethnic type of men, women and children, including the flora and fauna peculiar to the region. We can even call it an "Ethnical Art". The tradition of Man and the tradition of Art of a country are indiscernible. When a Bhumij (Born-of-Earth) or a Santal woman is ritually portrayed in her mortuary painting, we cannot dissociate the woman on the earth from her painted portrayal (Pls. XXII, XXIII-fig. a, and XXIV) in the Afterworld ; the physical tradition of a Bhumij woman and the art tradition of her mortuary painting are the same—both represent a clan or race including its ethnic type. And there a Bhumij furnishes himself as one of the important elements of the Bengali race.

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CHAPTER II

BRATA AND ART—THE THERIOMORPHS

THE tribes from highlands, who occupied the delta in the New Stone Age, did not necessarily belong to the same ethnic group; and all, having brought with them their different totemic systems, naturally came in conflict with one another; and in course of time, the weaker tribes were eliminated by the stronger ones.[1] Differing attitudes of primitive life were reformed amicably and reconciled with those of the dominating tribes. The members of a totem usually lived together exclusively in a particular island, archipelago, or in a region advantageously protected by a river system, otherwise they lived scattered over the delta separated from one another but living on friendly terms with the adherents of other totems. For example, the Mahisyas most probably settled exclusively in the Kansai delta whereas the Ponds lived scattered all over the littoral districts, maintaining inter-communications amongst themselves through the seas and rivers. The folk-art of Bengal is not a residue of an art created by a single aboriginal tribe of a particular region—the frog in a well, but the surviving vestige of an ancient community-art of the united tribes from the vast twin valleys of the mighty rivers, the Ganges and Brahmaputra, that have emanated from the high altitudes of the divine Himalayas.

From the remnants of primitive social systems that survive

[1] Tribal battles between a people belonging to the Buffalo-clan in the lowlands of South Bengal and a people belonging to the Lion-clan in the Himalayan region of North Bengal are indicated by a traditional composite-figure of the goddess Durga or Parbati. The annual observances of Durga and Basanti *pujas* in Bengal commemorate the quarrels breaking out in prehistoric times between the two and the final defeat of the Buffalo-clan (Pl. XIX).

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in our present-day arts, manners and customs, we can trace back with a fair amount of accuracy the early stages of tribal developments. For instance, it is very clear from the *paralaukik* paintings, executed by the Jadu-*patuas* (*ref.* Chap. V) for the Santals and Bhumijs, that the methods of disposal of the dead by entombment were at some point in time replaced by the introduction of cremation. Moreover, a Bengali married woman observes a taboo of complete exclusion with regard to the elder brother of her husband, but calls the younger brother "the second husband (*debar*)" although she never enters into sexual relations with him. Obviously, this restriction is a later development which has been imposed upon an older tribal custom. The marriage between a widow and her husband's younger brother is still extant among many tribes living on the border-lands of Bengal.[2]

Again, it is known through the media of legends, myths and fairy tales, that there were many totems—animals such as lion, fox, buffalo, cow and bull; reptiles such as caterpillar, serpent and crocodile ; and birds such as owl, peacock, crow and goose—which the primitive Bengalis believed to be their ancestors, tutelary spirits, and protectors. In addition, mountains, rivers, trees and forests were also considered as totems. But the most significant totems to which the Bengalis still adhere are duck, cat and serpent. These have conspicuously survived in the rituals of *brata*.

The fundamental religion in which the Bengalis are "born and brought up" is called *brata*. It is a domestic form of religion and apparently not associated with temple service. *Bratas* are performed exclusively by womenfolk with a view to fulfilling their aspirations by means of magical rites. It can be performed by a single person, or by the "elders in assembly" of five married

[2] A. Mitra—Census (1951) Report : *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal* (Calcutta, 1953), pp. 249 and 253.

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women *(ayes)*. Dr. Tagore observed : "At first a desire grows in the mind, the object is then drawn, modelled and decorated, and at last it is expressed in spells. First the desire, then the art *(alpana)*, next the spell *(chhada)* and in the end, the story *(katha)* or history—all these complete a *brata*."[3]

The term *brata* currently means "the taking of a vow", or "to undergo solemnly certain physical and mental conditions with a view to achieving a desired result or object".[4] And a *brata* is observed to satisfy "the natural forces or superior beings" believed to be divine powers or gods : the Sun-god, the Moon-god, the Star-goddess, the Earth-goddess, the River-god, the Rain-god, the Tree-god or goddess, the Bird-goddess, the Serpent-goddess, etc. There are nearly seventy *bratas* ascribed to the different gods and goddesses that are commonly known to us.[5] A great many have been lost ; but in remote villages there must be, I believe, a few more *bratas* which have escaped our attention and are still being practised by womenfolk. Each *brata* has its own purpose. For example, a married woman observes the Adar-Simhasan-*brata*, so that she may be affectionately treated by the relatives in her husband's house where she goes as a new-comer ; but the Shiva-*brata* is observed by an unmarried girl with a view to having a well

[3] Dr. A. N. Tagore—*Banglar Brata* (Visvabharati, 1947), p. 70. The above quotation has been translated by the present author from the original in Bengali.

[4] "*Brata* signifies a solemn or sacred purpose, ideal or objective which is pursued as a joyous rhythmic ritual simultaneously through an integrated employment of thought, word and physical movement, and is also used to signify the combined joyous integrated ritual itself." G. S. Dutt—*The Bratachari Synthesis* (Calcutta, 1940), p. 1.

[5] Among the books describing *bratas* and the connected stories, the following are most important : (1) *Banglar Bratakatha* (Calcutta) by Dakshinaranjan Mitra-Majumdar, (2) *Banglar Brata* (Calcutta) by Dr. Abanindranath Tagore, (3) *Meyeder Bratakatha* (Calcutta) edited by Bibhutibhushan Bhattacharya and revised by Pasupati Chattopadhyaya, (4) *Brata Katha* (Calcutta), by Kaliprasanna Vidyaratna, (5) *Meyeder Bratakatha* (Calcutta) by Asutosh Kaviratna, (6) *Sachitra Meyeder Bratakatha* (Calcutta) edited by Binaykrishna Mukhopadhyaya and revised by Sriram Sastri, and (7) *Meyeder Bratakatha* (Calcutta) by Asutosh Majumdar.

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featured and qualified husband similar to Lord Shiva. Some of the *bratas* are observed in the morning, some in the evening, and a few at night; also, on a particular day in the year, or every day for a month, and sometimes consecutively for three to five years in a particular month. According to their subject and purpose, they may be performed on the bank of a river, under a tree, outside in the courtyard, or inside the dwelling house of the devotee. Here is a religion that magically controls our domestic life, an art that chronologically records our culture and a literature that traditionally expresses the national mind. We are extremely grateful to our "priestesses *(ayes)*" who have preserved these traditions over the past thousands of years.

Originally, *brata* was not a secluded domestic religion for women alone, as we see it today, but existed as an *interior wing* of a "single and complete magico-religious observance" that also had a powerful *exterior wing* for men. Somehow or other, the link between the two sexes has now been lost or cut off. When a race or a people are politically conquered by another group of people, their very existence is often reduced to such a "depressed level" that the indigenous culture of the defeated people finally finds expression in a mean form and in a restricted sphere. As a matter of fact, the defeated people are apt to display a depressed or confused *ethos* due to the impact against an alien culture. The Bengalis as a whole are a depressed people who were subjugated by the Aryan-speaking invaders. Today, in art and religion, they express an *ethos* dragged to a "depressed level" resulting in a mean form confined within the restricted sphere. This "restriction" was the cause of the seclusion of *brata*. In other words, the introduction of the Brahmanic religion, philosophy, and mode of worship, tended to disintegrate the full-scale functions of the *brata* religion. It compelled the right-wheel (men's branch) of *brata* to fall from the axle and roll onto a lower level of the

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society, leaving the left-wheel (women's branch) aloof in the home.[6]

Although it suffered considerable mutilation, activities of the men's branch of the earlier indigenous priesthood have survived in the *jhapan*, *gajan*, and many other semimagical rites that are still observed by men alone. A *sanyasi* of the *gajan* festival should be considered as the male counterpart of a female *bratee* of *brata*. The activities of the men's branch are now connected with *puja* (temple service), although we know that *brata* is not *puja*. *Puja*, as we see it today, is connected mainly with the "religio-political gods" portrayed in anthropomorphic forms, whereas *brata* is connected mostly with household adoration of the gods representing "natural forces or superior beings" in imaginary, actual or theriomorphic forms. Though it is very difficult to draw a clear-cut line of demarcation between the two, since both of them sometimes overlap each other, we can broadly assign *brata* to household worship, and *puja* to temple cult. The former is a domestic ceremony and the latter is a public function of a single religion of magical origin. It seems that the nine caste-guilds of craftsmen, who are still actively associated with *puja*, originated and developed from the men's branch of *brata*.[7] The multitude of women *bratee*-artists and the thousands of traditional craftsmen are juxtaposed within

[6] As a matter of fact, Brahmanic art represents a corrupt degenerated tradition in India as Ptolemaic art in Egypt. Simply by studying Ptolemaic art one can have a very poor idea of the ancient art of Egypt. Similarly, Brahmanic art keeps a scholar far off the epicentre, wherefrom the age-old traditions of Indian art generated. *Cf.* Census (1951) Report : *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal* (Calcutta), edited by A. Mitra, wherein the present author has described the fall of the indigenous Acharya-priesthood and the rise of the alien Brahmana-priesthood in the Appendix between pages 345 and 346.

[7] The nine caste-guilds of the craftsmen of Bengal are: (1) the Chitrakara (the painter-caste), (2) the Kumbhakara (the potter-caste), (3) the Sutradhara (the architect-cum-sculptor-caste), (4) the Karmakara (the black-smith-caste), (5) the Swarnakara (the gold-smith-caste), (6) the Kansakara (the bell-metal-smith-caste), (7) the Malakara (the decorator-caste), (8) the Sankha-kara (the conch-shell-worker-caste), (9) the Tantubaya (the weaver-caste). *Ref.* A. Mitra—Census (1951) Report : *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal* (Calcutta, 1953), p. 399.

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the society as the spiritual guides and creator-priests or priestesses of the nation around whom the social and cultural life of all the people of the land, from a cooly to a king, revolves. The people and their divine creators are spiritually bound up with the traditional rites and rituals of *brata* and *puja*.

Although the relation between *brata* and *puja* has now become very indistinct due to the impact of Brahmanic religion and philosophy over the traditional religion, fortunately the craft traditions of the two wings are still vigorously surviving side by side. The entire craft production of the country is mainly aimed at supplementing these folk rites and rituals of the people. For example, a king cannot marry unless he is given a symbolic *shola* (pith) crown made by a Malakara (decorator-caste) to wear on the occasion of marriage, although he is financially able to afford a golden diadem. This rule is equally applicable to a cooly. A traditional craftsman is the son of the "god of craftsmanship (Visvakarma)". As the *son of a god*, he knows what and when things are to be created for his *men*. On the other hand, a married woman is a *brata*-priestess *(aye)* in her household by virtue of which she is the sacred member of the village ecclesiastical body of the female-*bratees*. She alone knows what ritual is to be performed in the house and what art is to be created for it. Certainly, both are and were complementary to each other.

However, the main characteristic of the *brata* religion is its theriomorphism, which has had its origin in the tribal beliefs and organizations of the various autochthonous ethnic groups who lived in and around the delta in the Neolithic Age. A syncretism amongst the local forms of animism and zoolatry of varying origin ultimately shaped the *brata* rituals and marked the inauguration of our art traditions with the theriomorphic images of gods who "were conceded as living or manifesting

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themselves on earth in 'theophanies', their 'living images on earth', as animals".[8]

In connection with the Subachani(=Subha-Chandi)-*brata* a miniature tank is dug out in the courtyard of the devotee, and on all sides of it pairs of ducks and drakes are drawn with white rice-paste. The tank is then filled up with milk. After worshipping the deity Subachani, the married women *(ayes)* sprinkle the holy water, touched by their feet, on the heads of the newly married couple to be blessed with a child—the future adherent of the Duck-mother. This *brata* is performed by a newly married woman who hopes to make the marriage fruitful by having children that alone can ensure the stability of her married life. The consequence of failure in this respect is that the husband may marry another woman in the hope of having an issue by her, a situation which would automatically bring great misery to the first wife. Subachani, the Duck-mother, can fulfil her craving for children and thus save her from the misfortune of having a *satin* (husband's second wife).

The following *brata* story related to Subachani, the Duck-mother, preserves a very interesting evidence of totem rule. By and large, it is a sacred obligation to the members of a totem not to kill or destroy their totem-animal and not to eat its meat. This rule is applicable not only to a single animal, bird, or tree, but to all the members of the species. If any member violates these prohibitions, he is automatically punished.[9]

Once upon a time, in the kingdom of Kalinga, there lived a poor widow with her son. They were so poor that meat was excluded from their meal over a period of many years. One

[8] Adopted from *GIGEC*, British Museum (London, 1930), p. 189. For the sake of brevity and convenience the term "theriomorph" has been allowed a wider meaning throughout the book than it should carry, in order to include birds.

[9] Freud—*Totem and Taboo* (P. B., 1938), p. 17.

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day the boy told his mother to include meat in their meal. "We are so poor, how can we get it ?" replied the widow grievously. "I will manage somehow," assured the son. There were thousands of ducks in the preserves of the king. Every morning they were taken to the royal lake in a flock (Fig. 2), and brought back in the evening to the king's palace. Among them was a lame duck that could not keep pace with the rest and always lagged behind. This gave an opportunity to the widow's son to catch it without being noticed by the king's

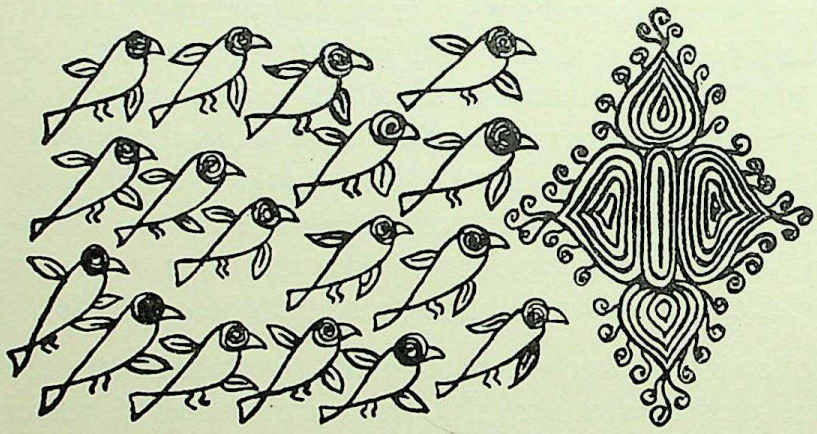

Fig. 2. An *alpana*, drawn in connection with the Subachani - *brata*, depicting ducks proceeding towards the royal lake. Collected by Abanindranath Tagore. Reproduced from his book *Banglar Brata* with the kind permission of his son Alokendranath Tagore.

guards. Secretly, the mother and the son cooked and ate up the meat of the duck. After some time, the king's guards discovered the feathers of the missing duck in a dustbin near the widow's house. The son was immediately arrested and put into prison under orders of the king. The widow, rendered very unhappy and dejected because of her son's imprisonment, went immediately to the place where the married women *(ayes)* of the city had been worshipping the goddess Subachani, and offered her adoration through them. The goddess became so pleased with her that the dead duck came alive at her bidding. Besides this, in a dream the king was

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ordered by the deity to release the widow's son. Later, he was astonished to see the lame duck returning home in the evening with the flock as usual. The amazed king then arranged a marriage between the widow's son and his own daughter. When the newly married couple came back to the widow's home they all offered their allegiance to the goddess Subachani, the Duck-mother !

We may also consider here the custom observed by us in the *atur-ghar* (the specially made hut, or room, in which the new-born baby stays with the mother for the first seven days after birth). This temporary hut is surrounded by a thorny creeper, lest the god Set-Ra, believed to be connected with evil, should enter it. On the very first day, an old skull of a cow is brought from the outskirts of the village and then placed on a metal plate in a corner of that room. Over the skull, a female figure is modelled with cow-dung. Two *cawris* form the eyes of the figure. She guards both the mother and the child for those seven days against the probable attack of Set-Ra, the god of evil. She is our Cow-mother.

Ancient tribal memories are more objectively preserved in the Buddhist scriptures than in the Vedas or the Brahmanical texts. The *Dirgha Nikaya* (3rd—4th Century B.C.) states that the Serpent-kings of the Sata hills (Rajmahal) were afraid of the Dwija-birds who used to kidnap them by force. Influenced by the teachings of Lord Buddha, Chitra and Suparna, the kings of the Bird-clan, made friends with the Serpent-kings.[10] Even today, we have typical examples of terra-cotta statuettes of the Bird-mother from the districts of Pabna and Mymensingh, situated in North-East Bengal, right opposite to the Satali hills. She has a bird's (duck's ?) head with hooded *coiffure*. The lower part of her body, modelled in human form,

[10] The *Dirgha Nikaya*, Mahasamaya Suttranta, Slokas 7 and 11. In Sloka 8 of the same Chapter the Crocodile-clan has also been mentioned.

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is draped with ornamental *mekhala* (skirt). She holds children at her arms and on the thighs. The nestlings suck milk from her exposed breasts. She nurses, feeds and caresses her children—she is our grand-old Bird-mother from whom many of us have been "anthropologically" born (Pls. I,II-figs. a,b,c and III-fig. d). These figurines are now used simply as playthings of children and no cult importance is attached to them by the adults; rather, these seem to be meaningless to many of us since the modern society has left the primitive phases of our culture far behind in which the tradition of these *brata*-dolls was deeply rooted. Many ancient cult-objects gradually lost their original magico-religious use and significance but have survived as independent model-toys or figure-toys (dolls) due to persistent demand from children. A cult-object, having lost its primitive uses, naturally became a toy at the hand of a child ! And we are extremely grateful to the Rarhi-kumbhakaras of North Bengal for furnishing us with the documents of an important art tradition that began to flow from an age we have now totally forgotten.[11]

Fortunately, in the year 1957 a prehistoric terra-cotta seal was discovered by P.C. Das Gupta, Assistant Curator, Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta, from Harinarayanpur, a village in the district of 24-Parganas. The seal, first of its kind ever discovered in Bengal, depicts two beak-headed figures (Pl. III-fig. c), the one to the right holding a forked staff. Das Gupta says : "Apart from the peculiar composition, the traces of deep chocolate slip, as also the sharp and linear abstraction of the figures almost reaching the glyptic obsession, astoundingly recall similar types from the Indus-valley, Egypt

[11] Pabna and Mymensingh districts are now in East Pakistan ; after the partition of Bengal most of the traditional doll-makers have migrated to the Goalpara and Cachar districts in Assam from where we still have these dolls. Previously, in the annual fair held at Langalband, in East Bengal, these dolls used to be sold in large numbers.

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and Crete and definitely link up Bengal with the lost civilizations of Western Asia, Egypt and Aegean world. There are several other seals of terra-cotta and bone (ivory ?) from Harinarayanpur which also point to the prehistoric contact between Bengal and the Near East, the motifs including a linear human figure, a deer, intersecting circles and semi-circles."[12] There lies no difficulty in recognizing these two figures shown in this prehistoric seal as two of our ancient theriomorphic gods, whose portraits have luckily survived in it. These two beak-headed gods are the prototypes of the modern theriomorphic figurines of Bengal. The importance of theriomorphic vases (Pl. X-fig. d), unearthed from Mohenjo-daro, have so far escaped attention of Indologists. They also furnish documents for the existence of a theriomorphic religion of *brata*-type in ancient India.

The Mother-goddess "Hate-po-Kankhe-po (Baby-at-her-arms and Baby-on-her-hips)", drawn in a linear *alpana* (Fig.3) of Tara-*brata*, complements these three-dimensional Mother-dolls. Being their two-dimensional counterpart in *brata*, she still bears magico-religious significance of producing children for barren women. It is believed in *brata* that we originated from a brace of birds called Khema-Khemi (Pl. XVII-fig. b), Goda-Gudi, or Hechi-Karkachi. They make us happy, give us plenty of corn to eat, and gold to be used as ornaments. In return they claim only devotion and loyalty:

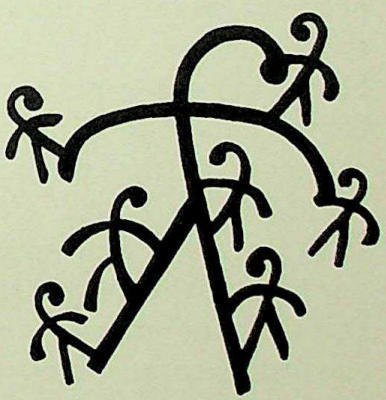

Fig. 3. An *alpana* connected with Tara-*brata*, depicting the Mother-goddess called Hate-po-Kankhe-po. Collected by Abanindranath Tagore. Reproduced from his book *Banglar Brata* with the kind permission of his son Alokendranath Tagore.

[12] *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, West Bengal State Supplement (Calcutta), September 30, 1958, p. XXVII.

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The bird Hechi with Karkachi comes,
—The farm has yielded plenty of corns—
Would they like rice, betel or creamed cake ?
With gold-bangles their arms let us bedeck !

Having pronounced the above spell over the *alpana*-portrait of Hechi-Karkachi, the devotee adores the couple and then prays for reward :

Bird ! Bird ! Bird ! may I be
Throughout my life very happy !

An old woman had three sons and three daughters-in-law. The youngest daughter-in-law was a greedy woman. Very often she used to steal delicious eatables from the kitchen and ate up quietly. Whenever her mother-in-law enquired, she blamed the pet black cat for all those missing sweets, fish or meat. Gradually, every member of the household became displeased with the black cat and cared no more to serve her with food. The cat belonged to Shashthi, the goddess of child-bearing. The unhappy cat reported the misdeeds of the youngest daughter-in-law to the goddess. After a few months this daughter-in-law gave birth to a beautiful male child. At night she slept with her newborn baby but next morning she found to her surprise that the baby was missing. One after another, in the same way, she lost seven new-born sons and a daughter within the next few years. All the inmates of the house took the mother for a man-eating ogress and accused her for the mysterious disappearance of the eight new-born babies. At last she was driven out of the house and was stranded in a forest.

One day the aggrieved woman began to weep in her forest dwelling. This made the goddess Shashthi treat her with compassion. She appeared before her in the guise of an old woman. "What makes you weep, my child ?" enquired the goddess. "Mother, I am a sinner," replied the daughter-in-law ;

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"I have lost my seven sons and a daughter on the very nights of their birth. My relatives now dislike and hate me," she added. "Well—did you blame my black cat for nothing ?" asked the goddess; and she then disclosed, "My cat has stolen all of your children and brought them to me!" On hearing this, the daughter-in-law could at once recognize the old woman as none but the goddess Shashthi and fell on her knees to beg mercy for her misdeeds. The goddess, being pleased, returned all her children and with them the daughter-in-law happily came back home. Since then she dared not tease the heavenly black cat and regularly observed the Shashthi-*brata*.[13] The goddess Shashthi is adored in *brata* widely in Bengal. In West Bengal, the goddess is depicted as a cat-headed woman (Pl. III-figs. a and b) in her terra-cotta figurines made by the traditional potters of Panchmura, a village in the district of Bankura. These small sized monochrome figurines from Panchmura are produced only in black in the process of firing. But in the delta, in the districts of Nadia, 24-Parganas, Howrah and Hooghly, her terra-cotta images are made in anthropomorphic form and are superficially painted in polychrome. In these images from the delta, the goddess is depicted standing on a cat painted in black to the exclusion of the rest (Pl. IV-fig. b). She is our Cat-mother.

From Narajole in the district of Midnapore (Pl. IV-fig. a) and from Balasore and Barpali areas in the State of Orissa we have equally important animal or bird-headed dolls too.[14] It is difficult to keep from comparing all these animal-headed figures of Bengal with the theriomorphic images of gods and goddesses from ancient Egypt (Fig. 4). A comparative study of the two will enable us to recognize these statuettes from Bengal as those of the "theriomorphic gods and goddesses" representing an

[13] Asutosh Majumdar—*Meyeder Bratakatha* (Calcutta, 1958), pp. 36-38.

[14] A. Mookerjee—*Folk Toys of India* (Calcutta, 1956), fig. 46.

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ancient tradition of local religion characteristic of which is its theriomorphism.[15] What had been on the highlands a totem or a tutelary spirit on earth as a complete animal or bird, was adapted in the delta as a human-bodied god combined with the earlier animal-theophany represented only by its head. This stage of culture has been noted in the Hindu chronological order as "Nrisimha-*avatara*" which signifies the conflict between "animalism" and "humanism" in our art and religion.[16] At this period the ancient Bengalis had almost passed the stage of aboriginal totemism and were about to enter the stage of *brata* religion. It was at this time that they first conceived the divine powers partly in their own image. These images thus represent a transitional stage of culture in Bengal when zoomorphism began to fade away and anthropomorphism crept in.

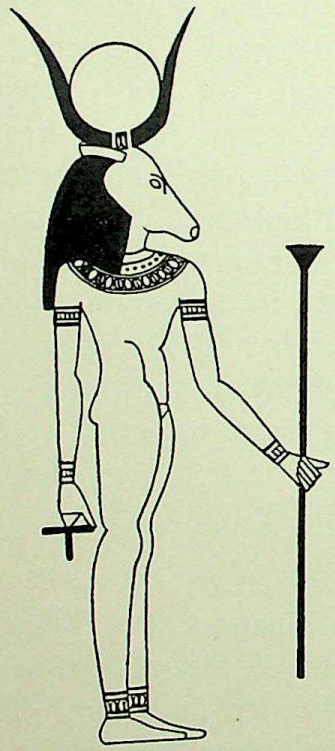

Fig. 4. Hat-hor, the cow-headed Mother-goddess from Egypt.

Representation of gods in theriomorphic and anthropomorphic forms is now being traditionally carried out in Bengal in the three recognized media, namely, (i) in the form of vessels (*ghata*), (ii) in the form of paintings (*pata*), and (iii) in the form of images (*murti*). One can worship a god by installing a picture, or an image, but most fundamental and essential form is the *ghata*, set up

[15] *Ref.* Hall—*GIGEC*, British Museum (London, 1930), pp. 190-193, wherein the figures of Egyptian theriomorphic gods and goddesses have been profusely illustrated.

[16] The Nrisimha-*avatara* has a lion's head on a human body. He is the fourth incarnation of Lord Vishnu. The first three incarnations are in the forms of fish, tortoise and boar. The rest from the fifth are human.

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compulsorily under all circumstances, which basically represents the deity. *Ghata-sthapana* (installation of a vessel) is the minimum pre-requisite for the invocation ceremony of a god. Whether the image, or the painting, or the vase, was first invented to represent the gods or the "supernatural spirits", we do not know ; but there is no doubt that the use of the pottery-images for the gods has been an ancient tradition in the country. Certainly, the tradition began with the theriomorphic vases and gradually, as time went on, it gave rise to the anthropomorphic vases, most probably due to foreign influence. Although theriomorphic vases are now not in vogue in the delta area, archaeological evidences are in support of the view that such vases had been in use among the inhabitants of Tamluk, at least in the 1st century A.D. In this respect, the Ram-vase unearthed from Tamluk and now preserved in the Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta, deserves attention of the scholars interested in the theriomorphic vases and religion.

It may be noted that, in India, we have two types of theriomorphic vases : (1) the wooden vases made in smaller sizes, such as those made at Bansi in Rajasthan, and (2) the big sized earthen vases such as those made at Rajgram in West Bengal. The first type of vases is used in the temples for the purpose of offering grains and valuables to the gods ; and the second type of vases, as we will see in the next Chapter, represents deities. A vase of the first type is a ceremonial container and a vase of the second type is a theological image. A Duck-vase from Bansi might have originally denoted the source, *i.e.*, the place and clan from which the offering had come, but a Snake-vase from Rajgram currently represents in itself a clan goddess.[17] Keeping these points in mind we may compare Indian theriomorphic vases with those of the ancient world.[18]

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[17] G. S. Dutt—*The Folk Dances of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1954), p. 135.

[18] *Ref.* Glanville—"Egyptian Theriomorphic vases in the British Museum", *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology*, Vol. XII, Parts I and II (London), April 1926, pp. 52-69.

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CHAPTER III

PUJA AND ART — THE ANTHROPOMORPHS

IN due course, exclusive primitive settlements of the various tribal groups in different regions bounded by natural geological limits *(kauma-bhumi)*, gave birth to geographical districts, or *nomes*, cities or towns, for the practical purposes of administration. A *kauma-bhumi* had been governed by the "elders in assembly" under the moral control of their totem, but a *nome* was ruled physically by a chieftain who claimed to be the representative of the tutelary spirit of his clan—a visible manifestation of a divine power, or a god on earth as man. As his powers grew with the development of local administrative system and as the royal dignity required to be elevated to the level of divinity of a true religious god, he declared : "I am the god—son of the god !" Theoretically he was declared to be of the very substance and essence of his tutelary deity. Officially a god, the feudal lord began to receive adoration from his subjects in the form of *puja*. Obviously *puja* was formulated in imitation of the earlier form of the rituals of worship of *brata*-gods performed in temples by the priests. Categorically a political *puja*-god differs from a religious *brata*-god and requires to be understood fundamentally.[1]

[1] For instance, if the falcon-headed Sun-god Ra is a *brata*-god, Amenhotep I, son of the Sun, with an imperial emblem on his head, is a *puja*-god ! The following lines from Dr. Hall regarding the ruler-gods of Egypt may be cited for comparison : "The king of Egypt was originally absolute master of the country which had been given to him by the gods, and every man, woman and child, and of everything in it from one end to the other, and in theory this was still maintained in later times, although it had ceased to be true at the close of the Old Kingdom . . . . Under the Old Kingdom the king was believed to be a god and was worshipped as a god, and even his fiction had become a mere *facon de parler*, and even his statues and figures were placed among the statues of the gods and with

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This is where politics and religion combine together ; but as is often the case, when the political power of such kings, or ruler-gods, gradually ceases, religious rituals connected with them are bound to continue as residual forms amongst the people. Many of the folk images of Bengal are the relics of such religio-political icons of the past, having happily survived as paraphernalia of our present-day religious observance. In the main, this is because of the inherent conservativeness of the Bengalis towards their traditional religion ; and also, partly because of their unconscious loyalty to the past formalities of the ancient *nome* governments, and *kauma* administrations. Many of our images of gods and godlings are nothing but portrayals of such chiefs and chieftains. They are distinguished by the people as *Bado-thakur* (Senior-god), or *Chhoto-thakur* (Junior-god) and their shrines as *Bado-kachari* (High-court) or *Chhoto-kachari* (Small-court). We are still their "serfs and bondmen". For example, Dakshin-dar of the South (Pl. X-figs. a,b,c), Sona-Ray of Tarai (North Bengal), Bangal-devata of Vishnupur (Bankura), Ray-Baghini of Chandrakona, Sitala, Manasa, Zar, Kali, Ganga, etc., may be identified with the ancient administrative authorities of Bengal. Even the Great-god (*Maha-deva*) Shiva with uraeus on his forehead, might have had such political origin (Pl. IX).[2] Most of these *puja*-gods, as we see them today, have attained much more prominence than *brata*-gods. They are not only being humoured in temples by the priests but are being invoked also

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them still received official adoration. In early days men lived by his grace only, and at a word from him they were slain. The basilisk uraeus on his forehead was the symbol of the king's power of killing. In short, the Egyptians were originally serfs and bondmen of the king, the counterpart, image and symbol of the god of the sky." Hall—*GIGEC*, British Museum (London, 1930), p. 180.

[2] *Ref.* S. K. Ray—*Prehistoric India and Ancient Egypt* (Calcutta, 1956), pp. 25-29. Kalidas Datta of Jaynagar-Majilpur, 24-Parganas, has given detailed information regarding the worship of Dakshin-dar in the district of 24-Parganas in the *Prabasi* (Calcutta), June 1951.

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by the priestesses in their *bratas*. Originally man-gods, they were later completely identified with their respective tutelary gods, as time went on.

The most striking feature of this type of images is that the so-called village deities are represented only by their heads placed invariably on their own ideographic pedestals. Even the pedestals are modelled more symbolically than the heads (Fig. 9). The shape of the pedestal of a god-head helps people to recognize immediately the rank, status and sex of the ruler-god. We shall see that the femininity of the goddess Manasa has been indicated by the egg-shaped bottom of the pot from Taleswar (Pl. XIV). Again, in the image of the goddess Sitala, the central part of the pedestal has been inflated into a round ball to signify the femininity of the divine ruler (Pl. XI). These god-heads, as their functions reveal, were a kind of substitutional effigies invented and used for emphasizing the presence of ruler-gods by proxy in their tax-collecting functions celebrated simultaneously at the various collectorates *(bhattis)* in the country. These busts of the ancient divine dignitaries thus represent the anthropomorphic tradition of image-making at its initial stage. With the political and religious progress in the country, anthropomorphs gradually replaced the theriomorphs, thus converting the animals into mere clan-symbols, now known as vehicles or *vahanas*—a changeover which can be interpreted as the triumph of "man over animal". This stage of imagery ultimately ushered in the epoch of full-figure drawings of the human body in our traditional art.

The first stage of the sculptural art of *puja* is marked with god-heads. When developed further into the second stage, it began to record and illustrate important historical and political events that took place in the country from time to time. The main event, we find, is depicted dramatically in three-dimensionally modelled figures and the related story is drawn

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separately in a two-dimensional painting on the background arch called *chalachitra*, fixed invariably at the back of and above the modelled images.[3] For example, the goddess Durga of the Lion-clan kills the demon of the Buffalo-clan in a fierce battle ; the goddess Kali dominates over the fallen Emperor-god after the great slaughter of her foes ; Lord Shiva, the Great-god, receives "free gifts" of foodgrains from the goddess Annapurna at the time of a great famine in the country ; these are the main themes that are adopted in modelling the foreground ; and the corresponding histories are presented in painting as the background. Such "composite-images" were originally invented to commemorate officially, and stabilize magically, the conquests, coronations, marriages, and other important events of life of a ruler-god, which continued afterwards in the rigid form of festival, or *puja*.

We have also a few "single" figures in large size as well as in miniature. Mostly they are anthropomorphs. The only theriomorph that is now widely worshipped through *puja* is the elephant-headed image of Lord Ganesa (Pl. V-fig. b and Fig. 5). It may be noted here that we do not find any theriomorphic figure of the Cow-mother in Bengal. A real cow is worshipped in *brata ;* and in the *atur-ghar*, as we have

Fig. 5. Lord Ganesa, the elephant-headed god of success. Reproduced from an wood-cut made in the year 1836 A.D. (After *Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, Vol. 46, No. 2, Calcutta, 1939.)

[3] For a *chalachitra* painting by an Acharya-painter of East Bengal refer to *The Modern Review* (Calcutta), November 1932, p. 528.

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seen, she is represented by the skull of a cow. The worship of a god in an animal body thus represents a gross form of zoolatry, the preparatory stage preceding the theriomorphic religion wherein divine powers were portrayed as human-bodied gods combined with the earlier animal-theophanies represented only by their heads. But in the case of the Cow-mother, as we see from the documents illustrated here, at least in India, if not in Bengal proper, her image was formulated in the reverse order as a human-headed animal (Pls. VII and VIII). The reason we do not know.[4]

The potters and *patuas* of 24-Parganas (the district covering the mouths of the Ganges in Southern Bengal) preparei mages (Pl. X-figs. a, b, c) of Dakshin-dar (the Door of the South), a *puja*-god, otherwise known as Dakshin-Ray (the Lord of the South) or Dakshineswar (the King of the South). He is known as *Bara-thakur* also and is annually worshipped on the last day of the month of *Paush* (December-Januiary), just after the main harvesting in Bengal is over. His *Puja* is followed by the *zatal* ceremony. The *Raymangal-kabya* tells us that he is the Lord of the eighteen *bhattis* (collectorates). The word *bhatti* means *bhet*, a present, or a tax. It also means a collectorate. The word is still locally used in this sense, *i.e.*, a *raj-bhatti*, a *gram-bhatti*, a present given to the king and a present given to the village headman respectively. We find a form parallel to Dakshin-dar in Southern Egypt (Fig. 6). Dr. Hall writes, "Under the bureaucratic regime the Chief royal officer (of Egypt) was the Vizier or Zat (Djat)... In early days the Southern *nomes* (of Egypt) were

[4] There is a number of dolls having animals' or birds' heads on human-bodies which are now being made in Bengal by the traditional potters (Kumbhakaras) and painters (Chitrakaras). Either I have failed to trace the one which has got a cow's head, or the tradition of such images has now altogether ceased to exist. Further research in this field may reveal the existence of cow-headed figures in Bengal.

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Fig. 6. King Narmer of Egypt wearing the Southern Crown, *C.* 3200 B.C.

ruled by a noble who usually bore the title of 'Great One of the Southern Thirty' (which we cannot properly explain), or '*Keeper of the Door of the South*', wich is understandable."[5]

"Dakshin-dar is a quasi-god,
Seats on a wooden rod !"

His bust is placed on a bamboo stick so that the tall determinative "Crown of the South" on his head may be easily visible from a distance. It is a wonder that the "White Crown" on the head of the "Lord of the South" of Bengal and the "White Crown" on the head of the "Lord of the South" of Egypt iconographically correspond to each other ! Why are their official designations and titles identical ? Why both of them co-exist in the southern regions of the Nile and Ganges in the same form ? When we read about the office and duties of a Zat from the inscriptions in the tomb of Rekhmara, a southern Vizier of Egypt (*c.*1450 B.C.),[6] we can well understand the office and duties of the Bengali "Door of the South" and the political motives that lie behind his *puja* called *zatal*. When a boatman passes through a southern river, when a fisherman fishes in a tank or *bil*, when a wood-cutter exploits a forest for his logs, when a village headman repairs

[5] Hall—*GIGEC*, British Museum (London, 1930), p. 183.
[6] Hall—*The Ancient History of the Near East* (London, 1952), p. 280.

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the old embankments, they all must offer *puja* to the "Door of the South". We can certainly recognize in this image from 24-Parganas the portrait of a high government officer, the "Governor of the South", which has traditionally come down to us from the remotest antiquity as an important historical document in the "archives" of South Bengal. Dakshin-dar is a Bengali Zat—our "Great One of the Southern Eighteen *(atharo-bhattir-raja)*"—for whom in ancient days *zatal* used to be performed for official collection of *bhattis* (taxes), payable annually to a Zat or Vizier by his tenants just after the harvesting of the main crop, *i.e.*, paddy.

In Upper Bengal, in the North, we find Sona-Ray (the Lord of Gold), a *puja*-god, dominating over a vast area from Goalpara in Assam to Purnia in Bihar and from Tarai of the Himalayas to the districts by the river Padma.[7] He is the northern counterpart of Dakshin-dar of the South. We do not have any doll or image of Sona-Ray. He is symbolically represented by a garland of flowers which hangs from a vertical pole. This garland of flowers represents a gold necklace which again is an "ideographic sign" for the "Lord of Gold (Sona-Ray)", the Governor, or the Ruler of the Golden-kingdom (Banga-ra or Banga-la) :

> There comes Sona-Ray—comes the Golden-groom
> Gold necklace ! Gold necklace ! necklace bridegroom !
> O Gardener ! bring again thy flower garland,
> That is our gold-necklace for Golden-husband ![8]

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[7] Ajaykumar Chakrabarty—*Sonarayer Gan* (Dhubri, Assam, 1953), p. vi.

[8] First four lines of a folk-song, collected from the district of Pabna by Niharbala Barua of Gauripur and translated by the author.—*Desh* (Calcutta), December 27, 1952, pp. 540-41. It is to be noted here that the term Bangala is derived from the Dravidian language. In Telugu the word Bangara or Bangaram means "gold". Grierson writes : "The word Bengali is an English one found on the English word 'Bengal' which may have been learned in Southern India, where the word 'Vangalam' occurs in an inscription of the great Tanjore temple, dating from the 11th century A.D."—*The Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. V, p. 11.

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The importance of Sona-Ray (the Lord of Gold) and his symbol, the "gold-necklace", cannot be ignored easily. We see that in an *alpana* on a *pidi* (ceremonial wooden seat), a gold necklace has been drawn to indicate the "seat" of a deity (Fig. 7). The two footprints drawn over the necklace obviously

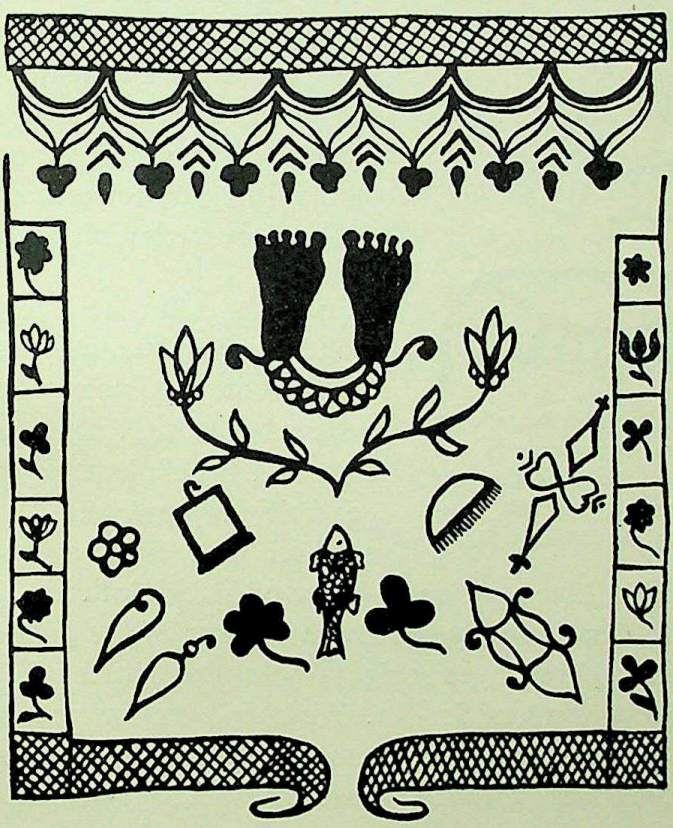

Fig. 7. An *alpana* (*pidi-chitra*). Collected by Abanindranath Tagore. Reproduced from his book *Banglar Brata* with the kind permission of his son Alokendranath Tagore.

represent a god or a ruler-god who dominates over gold, or a "Golden-land (=Banga-ra or Banga-la)". The political significance of this Golden-kingdom and its traditional ruler, the "Lord of Gold (Sona-Ray)" in Northern Bengal, is equally

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important to us as that of the "Door of the South (Dakshin-dar)" and his kingdom in Southern Bengal (*ref.* Appendix). It should be noted here that in Egypt a "gold-necklace" symbolizes the god Set (Fig. 8). Dr. Hall says, "The symbol for 'gold' (a gold necklace) beneath the hawk of Horus in this case signifies the god Set, whose town was Nubit or Umbit (Ombos), the 'golden'. The whole title then celebrates the king as the Horus (triumphing) over Set."[9]

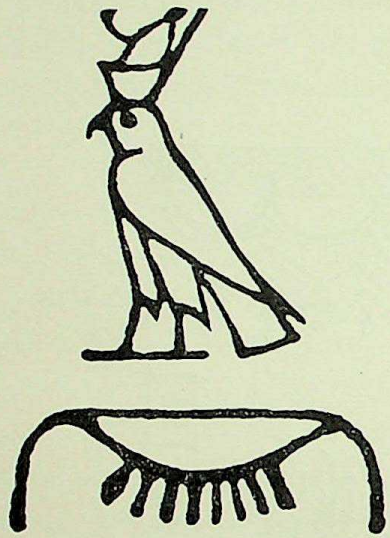

Fig. 8. A gold necklace beneath the hawk of Horus representing the god Set of Egypt. Compare the gold necklace beneath the two foot-prints in the *pidi-chitra* at Fig. 7.

Set-Ra (Sani = Saturn) is also worshipped in Bengal generally as a malevolent power; but it is believed that he, when pleased, can also be a benevolent power. He is generally represented by a black earthern pot and very rarely by an image. A black pot and a piece of black cloth are used in his worship. Traditionally, he is the brother of the goddess Durga and probably belonged originally to the North. Sitala is the female-counterpart of Set-Ra. We have a very interesting pottery-image of Sitala made of brass (sometimes in terra-cotta also), which comprises a female bust and an egg-shaped pedestal. This egg-shaped pedestal below the bust helps us to recognize the image (Pl. XI) as an "administrative equipment" and the

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[9] Hall—*GIGEC*, British Museum (London, 1930), p. 181. Did the word Ambastha, the name of a people who fought in the Punjab against Alexander, mean "golden" (=Bangali) ? Again, there probably lies a very important historical clue in the names of Amba, Ambika and Ambalika and their stories, especially of the mysterious "garland of never-fading flowers" described in the *Mahabharata*. *Cf.* C. Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* (Bombay, 1953), pp. 10-13.

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woman represented therein as an ancient hereditary female-ruler identified with female-Set-Ra (= Sitala). Her legends which have come down to us from time immemorial suffer from a mixture of mythological fancy and historical fact similar to those of Manasa. She is not the presiding deity over small-pox, as we now believe, but in fact is a pre-equine-period queen-goddess, who took much care of her sons (subjects) by introducing preventive inoculations against that fatal disease. The *Sitala-mangala* tells us that she transported on asses a large quantity of scales of small-pox, packed in bags, to be used as inoculations in the various parts of the world where it created tremendous commotion among the peoples and the medicine-men.[10] It is to be noted here that the modern inoculation system against small-pox has been scientifically adopted from the older oriental system of inoculation. The queen-goddess Sitala (identified with female-Set-Ra) of Bengal should be given the credit for the discovery and introduction of preventive inoculation against small-pox for the first time in the history of medical science.

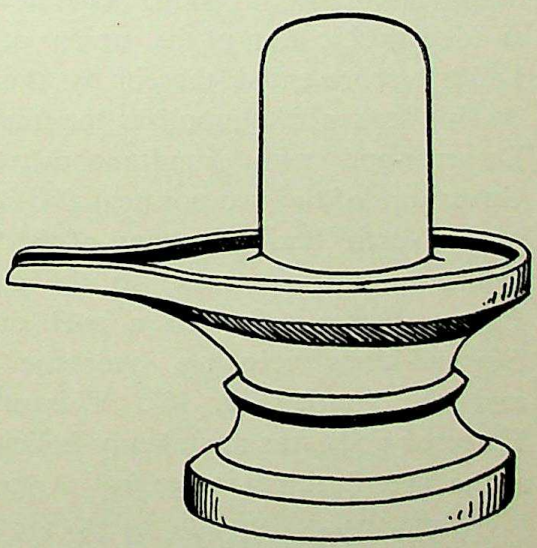

Fig. 9. A stone pedestal used for the bust of Lord Shiva (the so-called Shiva-*linga*),

Her sacred animal is the ass. In her composite-figure, made mostly in the delta, she is always depicted riding an ass and is accompanied by her able minister named Zar or Zara-pator and his wife Raktapati. The

[10] *Sitala Mangala*, edited by Dwija Nityananda (Calcutta, 1931), pp. 15, 16, 79.

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traditional portrait of Sitala (Pl. XI) denotes the "Himalayan" ethnic type which has been preserved also in the image of Durga, her sister-in-law (Pl. XIX).

We have an interesting clay-head of Mahadeva (Great-god) that comes from Nabadwip (Pl. IX). It is a military portrait of an Emperor-god identified with Lord Shiva. On his head there is a corrugated golden helmet and on the centre of it stands the symbol of "union" (the so-called *linga-patta*) along with four serpent-hoods (*uraeus*). The large-sized metal head of Mahadeva made at Chitpur in Calcutta has neither this "union" symbol, nor the helmet, because the bust is intended to be placed on its own ideographic stone-pedestal (Fig. 9), popularly known as *Shiva-linga*. The so-called *Shiva-linga* is not probably, as it is generally supposed by scholars, a symbol of the union of two divine generative organs, but seems to be an ideographic sign of the union of "two Lords" from "two Lands" represented therein by their respective local crowns. By this token, it symbolizes the unified power and rule of an Emperor-god who simultaneously dominates over the two Governors of the two political divisions of the country—usually of the North (Badin-dar) and of the South (Dakshin-dar).[11] Here again, we find a parallel to the symbolic imperial crown of Egypt. There it formed a part of the paraphernalia of the *Samtaui*-kings reigning over the two lands, *i.e.*, the North and the South (Fig. 10). This official emblem of the ancient Emperor-gods was mistakenly believed to be a phallic emblem at the later Brahmanic age (*ref.* Appendix).

The *Dirgha Nikaya*, in the chapter Mahasamaya Suttranta, as I have stated before, clearly mentions (in Sloka 7) the

[11] It should be noted here that there is a custom still prevalent in Bengal, according to which the bridegroom symbolically wears a round ceremonial *sola topour* (pith cap) of his bride on his own tall *topour* at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony, as a mark of the "union" of the two.

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existence of a Serpent (Naga) tribe on the Sata hills (modern Rajmahal hills and the Satali-*parbata* of Behula-story), situated in the region now known as Santal-Parganas, or Chota-Nagpur, adjacent to the present political border of West Bengal.[12] Just below these hills, on the western fringe of Bengal, we find that the people are zealously adhering to a Serpent-deity popularly known as Manasa. Her worship is not exclusively confined to this part of the country but is also observed in one form or the other practically in every district of Bengal. There are, however, some differences in the modes of her worship and the formations of her theophany varying from the districts in the western hill-tracts to the districts in the delta. On the western hill-tracts we find the snake as a totem, whereas in the delta a woman is found representing her Serpent-ancestors. On the one hand, the tutelary spirit of a Serpent-clan is manifesting

Fig. 10. A *Samtaui*-king of Egypt, wearing a double-crown symbolizing the North and the South.

[12] The inscriptions on the famous Bharhut Stupa of the 2nd Century B.C. also mention: "Erapato, the Naga King, worships the Lord"; "The Naga King Erapato"; etc., Majumdar —*A Guide to the Sculptures in the Indian Museum*, (Calcutta), Bharhut inscriptions Nos. 265 (a) and 265 (b), p. 92. Some scholars think that the word "Naga" does not mean a "snake" but a "pool", as it now denotes in the local language of Kashmir. But it is to be noted here that the popular legends always connect the Nagas with a "pool" as their dwelling place. The word probably means "Lake-dwellers". The Rajas of Chota-Nagpur, according to the family annals, believe that they originated from a Serpent (Naga) who lived in a pool. Dalton—*Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872), pp. 163-169.

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itself as a living image on earth in the form of a reptile, while on the other, a political person is exercising the hereditary rights over her subjects as a lawful claimant to the throne of the Serpent-dynasty. The significance of a snake when it is held by a deity in the hand is quite different from that of a snake spreading its hood over the deity's head or forehead. A snake-hood (uraeus) on the forehead may be the symbol of the ruler's power of killing, whereas a snake in the hand may symbolize the totem of her clan. One is the administrative emblem, the other is the socio-religious insignia. A careful study of the different images and vases used in the current worship and ceremonies, particularly of those illustrating the stories connected with the goddess Manasa in Bengal, reveals every stage of our cultural development, from the early beginnings to the present day (Pls. XII ; XIII-fig. a ; XIV; XV; XVI; XVII; XVIII).

There is a clearly distinguishable division between the Serpent-art in its most elementary forms, representing the supernatural or divine spirit, and the Serpent-art in its most highly developed forms, representing the royal power. Both operate under a single covering term—Manasa.[13] For example, the figure b in Pl. XII is completely a theriomorphic votive vase representing the totem-ancestor of the Serpent-clan directly in its natural reptilian form. The figure a in Pl. XIII is an anthropomorphic votive vase representing the divine spirit in human form wherein the snakes betoken only the source of the totem to which the goddess Manasa belongs. Pl. XIV is a political pottery-image representing a female ruler of the Serpent-dynasty, attributed with all the qualities and powers of her clan goddess Manasa—a living image of divinity on earth taking the form of a noble woman ! It is to be noted

[13] The term Manasa is not a personal name ; it means a son or daughter (*sa*) of Mano or Man and most probably denotes a clan name of a particular branch of the Bhumij (Born-of-Earth) tribe of Central India.

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that the femininity of the ruler-goddess is indicated by the egg-shaped bottom of this vase.

Manasa-*brata* relates that once upon a time there was a poor man who had seven daughters. All of them got married when they grew up, except the youngest who, because her

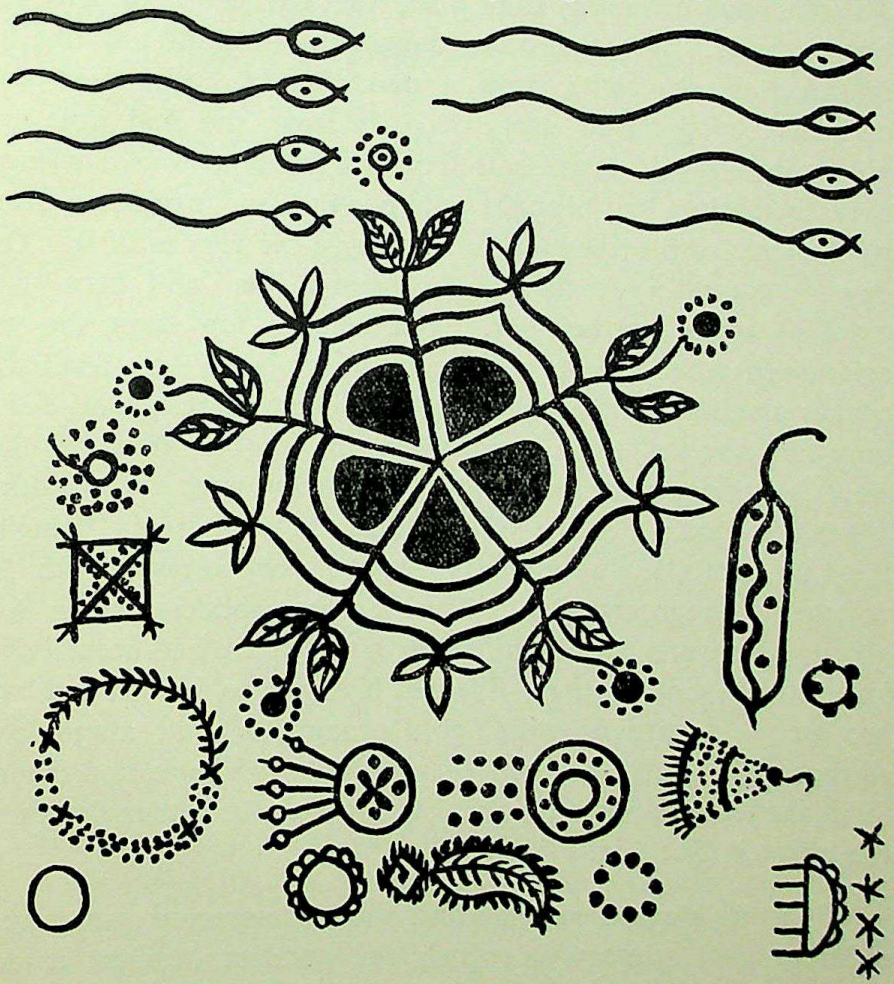

Fig. 11. An *alpana* related to Manasa-*brata*. Collected by Abanindranath Tagore. Reproduced from his book *Banglar Brata*. Courtesy—Alokendranath Tagore.

father could not arrange for the necessary dowry, remained unmarried for a long time. At last a rich old man, who had

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ten sons, agreed to marry his youngest son to the youngest daughter of the poor man. He was disgusted with his other nine daughters-in-law who had come from rich families and did not take much care of their old father-in-law ; so he wanted a young girl from a poor family who could serve him in his old days. The marriage ceremony duly over, the girl came to live with her husband. But the other daughters-in-law did not like her inasmuch as she came from a poor family. She used to be criticised by them at every step, because she had not been able to bring gold ornaments from her father's house, whereas they themselves had brought gold bangles and necklaces along with them. All these bad feelings made her very morose. One day she caught a few fish-zygotes from a pool and kept them carefully in an earthen jar. But after a few days she was astonished when she opened the lid of the jar to see a few baby-snakes playing in it, instead of fish. Quite quietly and for a long time she fed them, and when the snakes grew up they went to their heavenly abode, for they were the goddess Manasa's sons. For the young woman's kindness in bringing them up secretly, the goddess became very pleased with the youngest daughter-in-law. The Serpent-goddess, when told about the poverty and humiliation in which she had been living, immediately sent for her. She was brought to heaven and was profusely rewarded with gold ornaments and magnificent clothes. Her snake-brothers then brought her back, and thence-forth she lived happily on equal terms with the other ladies of the house.[14] (See Fig. 11).

In the *Manasa-mangala* and the *Padmapurana* we have a different type of story in which the goddess Manasa is described as *Padmavati*—"the Lady of the Lotus". In these mediaeval texts, she complains that "she had been expelled from

[14] *Meyeder Bratakatha*, edited by Bibhutibhushan Bhattacharya and revised by Pashupati Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta, 1956), Chap. Manasa-*brata*, pp. 96-100.

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her country without any fault on her part". On her arrival in Patala, as the *Manasa-mangala* says, she was permitted to settle only on the Sijua (Sahyadri ?) mountain, and was not allowed to enter into heaven. But after a long and hard battle she compelled Chand Sadagar and Sankar Gadudi (two ruler-gods of Bengal) to accept her as one of the "goddesses" in Bengal. She then finally settled in an old region called Zo-rat.[15]

There is a clear-cut line of demarcation between the themes of the two stories mentioned above ; one is religious and the other is political. The former is connected with *brata* and the latter with *puja*. From a mixture of historical fact and mythological fancy—from which the whole Manasa-story pathetically suffers—we shall have to analyse and discern the earlier totemic obligatory traits and the ancient mythological legends from the later historical facts implied in it. It is true that the tradition of a Snake-totem and its inevitable consequences over the lives of its adherents have been vertically carried over from one generation to the other, with various modifications at times ; but we should also note the diffusion of cultural progress the Serpent-clan has horizontally achieved in the geographical spaces through its political endeavours. Otherwise we shall not be able to judge the real meaning of our cultural contributions in their proper perspective ; failing which, we may mistakenly dismiss the goddess Manasa, as we are now doing, simply as a mere presiding deity over the snakes, the ignominious creatures on the earth.

It is interesting to note that the legends and ballads of Manasa are popularly known among the people of the delta as "the Voyage, or the Great Voyage (*Manasar Bhasan* or *Mahabhasan*)." In Delta art Manasa is often shown seated in or standing on a boat, sometimes accompanied by her Generals on

[15] The above summary is made by the author from the *Manasa-mangala* edited by Sudhindranath Laha (Calcutta, 1952).

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horse back (Pl. XVI). Most probably she was a foreigner who conquered the country by force, with the help of a well-organized cavalry brought by sea, under the able guidance of a few efficient Generals. A post-asinine-period female-ruler with whom, as the *Manasa-mangala* tells us, there began for the first time in Bengal the rule of "a monstrous regiment of women" which never received faithful acceptance from the people. And, as such, she claimed all the hereditary rights and powers of the throne of the native Serpent-dynasty. By way of a marriage between herself and Zaratkaru, who was probably a prince and the high-priest of the indigenous Serpent-clan, she claimed also the dignity of the office of the high-priestess of the country where she had been a new-comer.[16] We see her in full-sized images, majestically sitting on a throne as a beautiful modern woman, clad in fine garments and bedecked with fabulous jewels, yet holding a snake in the hand as a clannish symbol of her adopted ancestry (Pls. XVI, XVII-fig. a and XVIII). She is our Serpent-mother !

O goddess Manasa ! I bow to thee,
Mother of Astik, sister of Basukee,
Muni Zaratkaru's queen beloved,
O mother ! I bow down my head !

[16] Her place of worship is called *pat* which means an honourable seat, namely, the throne. From the *Manasa-mangala* we may infer that she was also a *kaminya* of Dharma-raja (a female-server, or priestess, of the god Dharma-raja). Further research in this field may enable us to define the personalities of the ruling goddesses of this Serpent-dynasty as the Manasa-I, Manasa-II, and so on.

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CHAPTER IV

GODS AND THEIR INVOCATION BY PRIESTESSES

A two-year-old girl, with her childish desire, may trouble and annoy her elders in their performance of *bratas*. But she becomes a perfect junior *kumari bratee* (unmarried devotee) when she grows up five years old. She then goes to pluck flowers, digs out *brata*-pits, attempts to draw *alpanas* and model images, tries to memorize and recite spells, under the affectionate guidance of her seniors. She may not understand everything, but certainly enjoys (as a proud partner) much of the community songs, stories and arts that are performed and executed by her senior colleagues—sister, mother and grandmother. As she grows up an adult, she finds the spells, learnt in her childhood, very befitting to her heart :

O Haro ! O Sankaro ! Kind so be,
—Let not a rustic marry me !

When she is married, her spells would contain many things more :

Plenty of wealth be in the house,
Sheds be full of milching cows ;
Let my sons be honoured in royal palace,
And assembly-hall may my sons-in-law grace !
The home my daughters would illuminate,
Vermeil must remain in the box fully set.[1]

Married, chaste—with conch-shell and iron bangles on the wrists and vermilion mark on the parting of the hair—she becomes fully eligible to take part in *bratas* as an honourable

[1] Vermilion mark is put on the parting of the hair of a married woman to distinguish her from a maid or a widow.

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aye (pure priestess). When she grows older she officiates as the chief priestess and, with her great experience, conducts the whole rites of *brata* ; prompts the spells (*chhada*) ; narrates the stories (*katha*) ; controls the duties of the juniors and supervises the drawing of *alpanas*. Thus from mother to daughter and daughter to mother, the tradition flows immortally.

Each *brata* has its own *alpana* which, at the time of its performance, is drawn with finger-tips on the ground neatly cleaned and coated with clay-slips. The *alpana* related to a *brata* must clearly depict the object the *bratee* (devotee) desires to have, otherwise its performance will be meaningless and impossible.[2]

We worship a comb drawn in rice-paste,
Gold-combs for us it may devise !
We worship a casket drawn in rice-paste,
Gold-caskets for us it may devise !
We worship a palanquin drawn in rice-paste,
Gold-palanquins for us it may devise !

An object is drawn to symbolize a desired result, in the conviction that in this way the actual article will be brought about. This is where an art has to serve the magic.[3] As a matter of fact, *alpana*, or *ali-pana*, is an indigenous (*deshaja*) word meaning the "art of drawing *ali* (embankment or wall)". The purpose of these *alpanas* was originally to keep dwelling place, city, or village safe and prosperous, and to make the cultivated land fertile and fruitful, by magical performance. Primitive women were inspired to draw a city or a field in *alpana*, for their own benefit and subsistence and not for mere artistic decoration.

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[2] *Alpanas* are drawn with the pigment made of powdered rice dissolved in water (=*pithuli*). For detailed description refer to the *Alpana Siksha* (Prabartak, Calcutta) by the present author.

[3] *Cf.* L. Adam's *Primitive Art* (P. B. 1935), p. 48, for rituals connected with sympathetic magic.

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A spell from Bhaduli-*brata*, the City-magic, will clearly explain it :

Bhaduli, Indra's mother-in-law, we bow to thee !
Save us every year, protect the devotee's city !

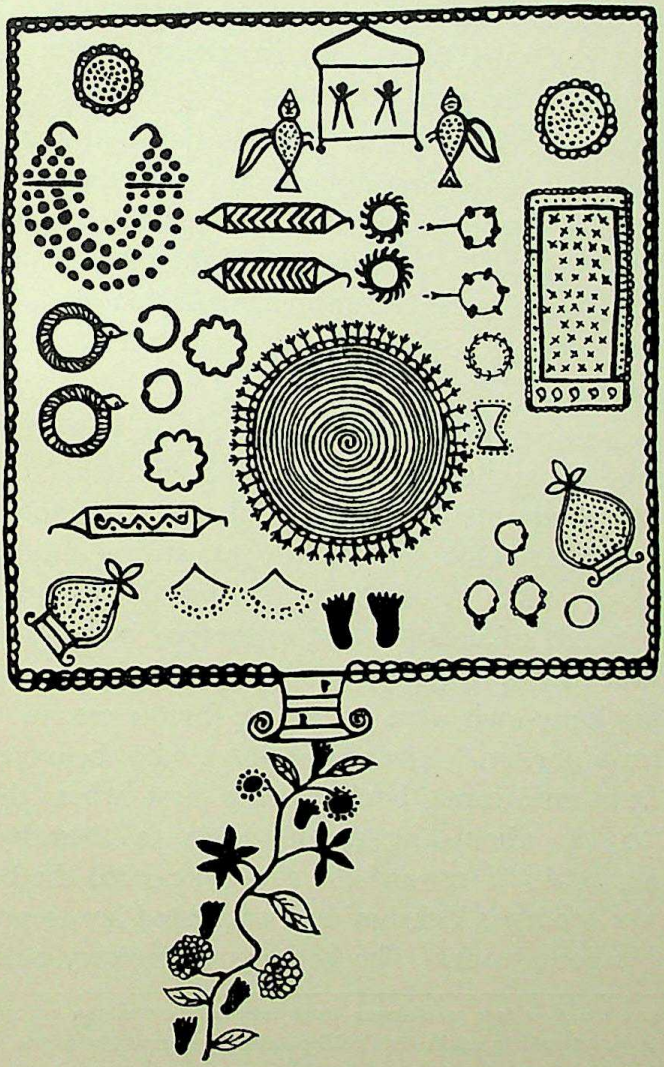

Fig. 12. An *alpana* related to Lakshmi-*brata*. Collected by Abanindranath Tagore. Reproduced from his book *Banglar Brata* with the kind permission of his son Alokendranath Tagore.

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Again, the *alpana* related to the Land-magic and drawn in connection with Lakshmi-*brata* unmistakably illustrates its relation to agriculture (Fig. 12). In the centre of it seventeen circular coiled lines represent the furrows, the outermost edge of the *alpana* being decorated with a row of paddy plants. In Rajasthan, *alpanas* are still drawn to depict cities protected by walls and cultivated lands with irrigation channels indicated by water-marks in between the *alis*[4].

As already stated, the goddess Lakshmi represents the wealth of the delta—the first divinity of our fertile alluvial tract. Unlike Manasa, she never has had any political significance. But as her sacred bird is the *Mei* species of the owl, we are inclined to accept the goddess as the anthropomorphic manifestation of the earlier tutelary spirit of the *Mei* branch of Owl-clan (Pl. V-fig. a).

In connection with this *alpana* the senior priestess narrates the following *brata* story related to the goddess Lakshmi and her owl. Once upon a time there lived a poor widow and her son in a village. One day the boy was sitting under a tree on the side of a road. A milkman, seeing the boy very hungry, gave him a bit of cream. But as the boy began to drink, his attention was drawn to a noise coming from the top of the tree. Two hungry baby-owls were screaming for the cream. The boy served them a portion. The mother-owl, who belonged to the goddess Lakshmi, came back to the nest when the chicks reported to her about the cream given to them by the poor widow's son. As a reward the she-owl carried the boy on her back to the goddess Lakshmi and requested her to grant him a boon for his good work. The goddess, being very pleased, gave

[4] The derivation of *alpana* or *ali-pana* from *alimpana* or *alepon* of Sanskrit origin appears to be grammatically right but falsifies the real origin of the word. In 1876 A.D. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, the great Bengali novelist, used *alipana* in his introduction to Dinabandhu Mitra's Works (Basumati Edition, p. 5) and it shows that at that period this word used to be pronounced properly.

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the boy her *jhapi* (Pl. IV-fig. c) and instructed him to worship it daily to get rid of poverty. The mother and the son followed her instructions faithfully and in course of time became so rich that the king of the country had to give away his daughter in marriage to the son of the widow.[5]

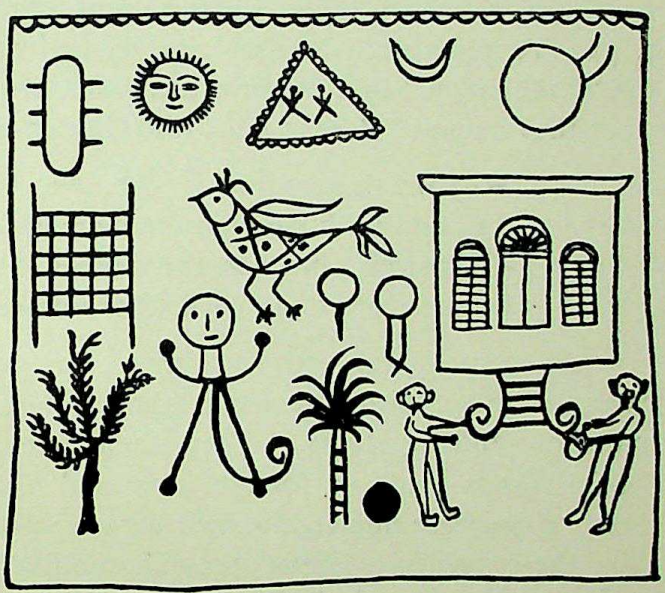

Fig. 13. An *alpana* related to Sezuti-*brata*. Collected by Dr. Abanindranath Tagore. Reproduced from his book *Banglar Brata* with the kind permission of his son Alokendranath Tagore.

But the most important *alpana* ever recorded in West Bengal is the one that depicts the "seat of a god" drawn on a ceremonial wooden stool (=*pidi*; Fig. 7). It can be explained as the "Government-magic" wherein the prosperity and stability of the "double-wings" of the "Golden-kingdom" have been magically ensured. Though this *alpana* was first recorded by Dr. Abanindranath Tagore only fifty years ago in his book *Banglar Brata*, the pictographs of which the *alpana* is composed, when compared with the ancient Egyptian (Fig. 8) and Indus-valley arts (Pl. V-fig. c), reveal amazingly an ancient record of the establishment of the *Bangala* (= golden) kingdom the date of which can be assigned to the prehistoric period. (*Refer* to the Plate Notes).

[5] *Meyeder Bratakatha*, edited by Bibhutibhushan Bhattacharya and revised by Pashupati Chattopadhyaya (Calcutta, 1956), pp. 114-118.

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We have an interesting *alpana* drawn in connection with Sezuti-*brata* which commemorates the conquest of the country by a new people. The native Dom rulers were utterly defeated by them (Fig. 13). *Brata-alpanas* record not only the geographical conditions of ancient Bengal but also the growth and development of cultural, political and economic life in the delta. People also loved their country and we see in a spell of the "Lake-magic" that the priestesses are proudly worshipping what they named "*Punni-pukur*—the Golden-lake".[6]

Why the flowers float ? Ah, who is she,
At noon doth worship the Golden-sea ?
—Sister of a brother, the mother of a son,
Chaste and young (I float the flowers on) !

As commercial activities grew, the people in the delta came in contact with foreigners who brought with them new manners and customs. They themselves also travelled to foreign lands and on foreign seas and rivers, which helped them to increase immensely their geographical knowledge, and thus their primitive views became modified as time went on.[7] A *bratee* who first desired to have a gold comb, a necklace or a casket, later became more concerned for her husband, brother

[6] The word "punni" should not be explained here as "sacred". As it is now used in Tamil, a Dravidian language, the term *poon* means gold. In the same sense we still use in Bengali *poonnay*, *pon*, etc., which originally meant "payment in gold".

[7] Many *brata* stories relate about a man in trouble in a foreign country, who came to know about a god or goddess by adherence to whom he could have ended his misery. Stories clearly indicate cultural and religious exchanges between foreign people and the native merchants. A theory of cosmogony was also formulated at this time. It is still expressed by setting up an earthen pitcher which is filled with water. On the top of the pitcher a green cocount is placed on a mango twig. It symbolizes the earth containing water (ocean) and vegetation. At the four corners of the pitcher four bamboo posts, each having a V-shaped palm-leaf cap, are planted. The pillars are then surrounded by red threads which form a square around the pitcher. The sun, the moon and the stars made of *sola* (pith) hang above the pillars. The four cardinal points are marked by the pillars on which the sky with its stars, the sun and the moon rests. For similar theory of Egyptian cosmogony refer to *GIGEC*, British Museum (London, 1930), p. 204.

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and relatives participating in voyages to far-away countries for commercial purposes, their safe travel and sure return. She had to wait anxiously for days and months for reunion with her separated dear ones :

River ! O River ! where do you go ?
News of my father and brother let me know !
River ! O River ! Where do you go ?
Message from my husband and his father let me know ;
Waters of the river or of the sea, whatever may you be,
Whereabouts of my father and brother you must tell me !

But crude magic did not help her much in the matter. Gradually she came to know what a cyclone meant to a boatman on the rough sea, what astronomical values the sun, the moon and the stars had to a desolate sailor aboard, and the power of a gale that could bring her relatives quickly back. She kept her mind constantly alert and eyes open on a larger world, which psychologically brought her out of the village span.

Wind blows over the seven seas !
On which bay floats the boat of his ?

With agony of expectation she enquired again and again of the sea and river about a sure date of their arrival, and in reply a distant echo told her—"Today ! Today ! Today !" She was overjoyed when her relatives returned home :

Anchored on the bank of Ganga—Ray has returned !
Receive him with oil and towel—Ray has returned !

The invisible powers of the "nature-gods", which made possible the safe arrival of her dear ones, were gratefully acknowledged. Her prayer to the Sea-god, who was very kind to her, had been answered :

Sea ! O Sea ! you must be
My friend—I pray to thee !

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The rain, the wind, the sun, the moon, the stars, the boat, the island, the sand-bed, the river—all helped her husband, brother, father and father-in-law to get safely back home !

Neither an ancient text nor an archaeological inscription has yet been discovered, or unearthed, to tell us the history of this period, but it is being narrated and sung vividly in connection with the *brata* rituals by our womenfolk. History has survived in the traditional songs and spells composed of rolling tears of anxious mothers, daughters, sisters and wives of the ancient Bengali travellers, boatmen, and merchants, who went to far-off countries on commercial voyages that took months and years to complete. Most of the *brata* stories and spells that have come down to us through oral tradition, are nothing but prayers for the safe home-coming of their father, brother or husband from abroad.

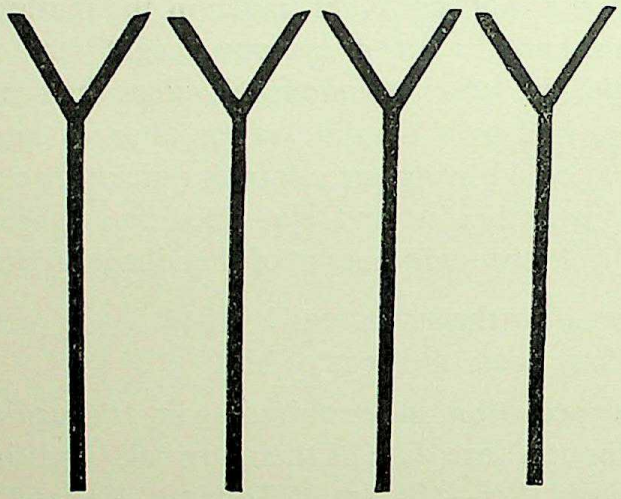

Fig. 14. Four Tir-kathis made of bamboo sticks mounted with V-shaped palm-leaf caps. They represent four corners of the world. Although used in ancient Egypt, these are still in vogue in Bengal (*ref.* Chap. IV, n).

Brata, originally a crude witch-craft,[8] gradually developed into a system of "worship through art". Spell became poetry and magical *alpana* became art. The spells are the "lyric cry of the soul" and the *alpanas* are the reflections of delicate desires of the mind of our womenfolk.

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[8] For example, the following spell, related to the *alpana* of a fish-chopping knife, speak of a witchcraft :

O knife ! O fish-chopping knife !
Behead the husband's second wife !

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CHAPTER V

GODS AND THEIR PROPAGATION BY PRIESTS

IN a *brata* the spell requires illustrations (*alpana*), because an illustrated object is to be materially acquired, or an existing object is to be stabilized by magic ; but the story, or *katha*, requires to be heard as a moral obligation to a deity in adherence to its cult. The spell is magic and the story is religion. The spell leads to material achievement, but the story leads to spiritual destiny. One is the medium to gain earthly comforts and the other to obtain happiness in the Afterworld ! The spell is older than the story (*katha*) as poetry is older than prose. Perhaps *katha* was incorporated into the *brata* of women from men's branch of priesthood at a later stage, which also transformed the primitive magical character of *brata* into a consummate domestic religion. On the other hand, the story (*katha*) of a deity requires illustrations to visually educate a large number of people in the doctrine of the cult. We see *katha*, in its fully developed form, playing a vital role in the arts of our priest-painters (Pls. XX-figs. a, b and Pl. XXI-figs. a, b).

As evidenced from the scrolls, a *katha* is generally divided into four parts, *viz.*, (1) displeasure of a god or goddess for non-fulfilment of a promise ; (2) days of trouble caused by the god or goddess ; (3) fulfilment of the promise by the man or woman so put to trouble ; (4) the *mangala* incident, *i.e.*, the protection of the *bhakta*, or devotee, by the deity, as a reward for his devotion and loyalty. It is hoped that the reader will find in the story of King Salban, illustrated and narrated here, the very characteristics of a *mangala-pala* (adulatory drama). A *mangala* story must end in a "comedy" to

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demonstrate the *mahima* or *mahatmya* (glory and power) of the deity to his or her *bhakta* (devotee). The stories illustrated by the priests in their scrolls (*pata*) clearly give us an idea of the Bengali traditions of *mangala-kabya*, or *panchali*, or *pata* (a pictorial tradition), and finally a popular religion of the *brata*-type or a system of religious propagation that existed in ancient India.[1]

Once upon a time there lived a rich merchant, named Dhanapati, in the city of Ujani. He had two wives, Lahana and Khullana. But he did not love Khullana as much as he loved Lahana. Instigated by Lahana, Dhanapati reduced Khullana's status to the keeper of his goats. The unhappy Khullana was thereupon persuaded by her friends to worship the goddess Mangal Chandi in order to find solace in her miseries ; and having done so, by the grace of the goddess, she conceived. When Khullana had carried her child for six months, Dhanapati set out with his twelve boats full of merchandise, seeking trade with Singhala (Ceylon). But he made a mistake in failing to first give reverence to the goddess Mangal Chandi before his departure. On his way to Singhala, Dhanapati saw a "Lady on the Lotus (*Kamale-kamini*)", swallowing an elephant and again ejecting it. This amused him very much, and on his arrival at the court of King Salban (Salibahana of Andhra ?) he reported this extraordinary occurrence to the king. Being immediately curious, the king asked Dhanapati to accompany him to the place where this had happened. So both of them sailed at once on a boat to see it. However, when they arrived nothing could be seen there—neither the elephant nor the "Lady on the Lotus". The king was bitterly disappointed and took it as nothing but a cruel hoax (Pls. XXI-fig a and the

[1] *Cf.* Census (1951) Report : *The Tribes and Castes of West Bengal* (Calcutta, 1953), edited by A. Mitra, wherein the present author has described the various scroll paintings produced by the *patuas*, the priest-painters, between pages 311 and 312.

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Frontispiece). Dhanapati was promptly put into prison by the angry king.

In due time, Khullana gave birth to a son, Srimanta. When the boy grew up and came to know about his missing father, he proposed to sail in search of him. His mother consented, but at the same time she instructed the boy to invoke the goddess Mangal Chandi whenever he would be in trouble. In the midst of the ocean the boy also saw the "Lady on the Lotus" and upon his arrival at the court of King Salban he likewise reported it to the king. The king, along with Srimanta, sailed immediately to see it. But, as in the case of the father, neither could the boy show the king the "Lady on the Lotus." Once again disappointed, the king ordered his executioner to behead the boy. The executioner took Srimanta to the sacrificial ground and, as he swung his sword up, the goddess Mangal Chandi, being invoked by Srimanta, appeared on the spot and took the boy in her lap. She claimed Srimanta as a "divine child" and declared him to be innocent of crime. The king, when informed, came to the place. Then the goddess explained to him that she had been fondling her son Ganesa, the elephant-headed god of success, in the "Lotus-lake", and this was what the merchant and his son had both seen, but that in her maternal reticence she preferred not to be seen by the king and had worked a magic to become invisible. She then ordered that the king should at once release the innocent father and his son. With these words the goddess disappeared. The king immediately married his daughter to Srimanta, freed the merchant from prison, and sent them back home.[2]

The pictorial arrangement in the painted scrolls made by the

[2] For the *panchali* version of this story refer to *Mangal Chandir Panchali*, collected by Krishnachandra Gupta (Calcutta, 1954). The Goddess Mangal Chandi of the priest-painters is called as Subachani (=Subha-Chandi) by the priestesses in their *brata*; both the terms mean "Chandi the benevolent". For the *brata* version of her story refer to Chap. II.

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priest-painters is in the form of a sequence almost recalling the early days of the cinema. Each scroll opens with a large-sized *portrait* of the presiding deity or saint (culture-hero) at the top end, followed by a series of pictures illustrating his or her *katha* (story), award or punishment to mortals for their good or evil, loyal or disloyal work, and closing at the lower end with a court scene of Zama, the god of Death. This last scene of the court of Zama (Pl. XXI-fig. b) does not always occur at the end of each scroll, and when it does not, there is a concluding scene of the main story—a comedy or *mangala* incident—*i.e.*, rescue or protection by the presiding deity of the *bhakta* (devotee) from death or slaughter. Interesting scenes are carefully selected from the long story and illustrated in a self-contained pictorial-drama. These scrolls can be called *mangala-palas* in the same sense as the more famous *mangala-kabyas*.[3]

The priest-painters, or *patuas*, as we call them, gradually unfold the painted scroll to the spectators and display the serially arranged pictures with explanatory verses sung aloud. *Patuas* live in the delta and in the western sloping land, and their activities are mainly limited to the *samajik* (socially advanced) people of the delta. But as we climb up to the western hill-tract we meet a different class of priest-painters known as Jadu- or Duari-*patua*. Their arts and crafts are intimately connected with the different tribal groups living around them. In the scrolls painted by the *samajik*-group of painters we see that the *judgment scenes* have been given prominence, whereas the scenes from the lives of deceased persons enjoying earthly comforts in the Afterworld have been emphasized in the paintings of the Duari-*patuas*. The *paralaukik* painting illustrated here (Pl. XXIII-fig. a) depicts a Bhumij woman of West Bengal in the Afterworld attended by her four maidservants serving food, and fanning with a *chamara* (fly

[3] *Cf.* A. Bhattacharya's *Bangla Mangal-kabyer Itihas* (Calcutta, 1939).

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whisk) and a palm-leaf fan. The painting, which the author collected from Binpur is now in the Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. It is predominantly painted in exuberant emerald green on red and brown background, and is the most important document of this type of tribal art ever discovered in West Bengal.

We must also consider the most important ceremony connected with these paintings, known as "*chakshu-dana* (bestowal of eye-sight)". When a man, woman or a child dies, the Jadu- or Duari-*patua* appears at the house of the bereaved family with a ready-made painting of the deceased (Pls. XXII, XXIII-fig a and XXIV). He draws the picture of the deceased with only one omission, *viz.*, the iris of the eye. He shows the picture to the relatives and tells them that the deceased is wandering about blindly in the Afterworld and will continue to do so until his or her eyesight is given back, for which he (the priest-painter) should be paid ! So the relatives make presents of money, or some other articles of domestic use, to the Jadu-*patua*, who then puts the finishing touches to the painting by performing the act of *chakshu-dana*, or supplying the iris of the eye in the figure of the deceased ![4] These semi-magical rites connected with the present-day funerary art of Bengal can be compared with those of ancient Egypt. "The objects of all the ceremonies which were performed over the mummy or the statue in the tomb was to bring back the soul from heaven to the body in which it dwelt on earth, and when the priest told the kinsfolk of the deceased that 'Horus had recovered his eye', *i.e.*, that the soul had returned to the body, they felt that everlasting life and happiness were secured for him."[5] The art tradition of the Jadu-*patuas* belongs to an

[4] *Ref.* G. S. Dutt—"The Tigers' God in Bengal Art" : *The Modern Review* (Calcutta), November 1932, p. 527.

[5] Hall—*GIGEC*, British Museum, (London, 1930), p. 226.

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older strain than that of the *samajik-patuas* and, as is evident from the above, it had been in the mortuary services connected with entombment of dead bodies in ancient days.

A Jadu-*patua* is an undisputed authority on the semi-magical mortuary rites of the deceased. He knows how a man is put to death by a *pisacha*, an evil spirit (Pl. XXIII-fig c). It is he who can lead the dead bodily from this world to heaven—an act for which he himself is ritually capable. But on a similar occasion, a *samajik-patua* would depend on Zama, the god of Death, who alone can decide the destiny of the soul, but only after judging the good and evil deeds the deceased has done in his or her lifetime. The righteous are allowed to enter heaven as a reward, while the wicked are detained in hell to suffer (Pl. XXIII-fig. b). Thus, a man is inspired by *art* to practise good deeds in his present and future births. A righteous man may ultimately acquire complete virtue to qualify his soul to live eternally with God in heaven on its deliverance (*mukti*) from this mortal world :

Farewell to thee ! O goddess of Earth !
For me there should be no more of birth ![6]

[6] Translated from a spell of the Prithivi-*brata* collected by Abanindranath Tagore and published in his book *Banglar Brata* (Visvabharati, 1947), p. 7.

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APPENDIX

THE KINGDOMS OF THE SOUTH AND NORTH

The local administrative set-up of ancient Bengal, with which these god-heads were officially associated, may be noted here. "Of the sixty or more Harappan sites," says Sir Mortimer Wheeler, "two—Harappa and Mohenjo-daro—are so immensely larger than the others as to suggest to Professor Stuart Piggott a duality of control."[1] Professor Piggott has very intelligently suggested, on the basis of the distribution of prehistoric sites in the Indus-valley, that a dual Government under a common authority might have controlled the country from two big cities—one from Mohenjo-daro in the South and the other from Harappa in the North. "Whatever the system of rule and however enforced," says Professor Piggott, "it can hardly be that of the two competing city-states, but must represent a common authority having a dual seat of government. . . . On the evidence as it stands at present, we are entitled to regard the Harappa kingdom as governed from two capital cities 350 miles apart, but linked by a continuous river thoroughfare. That the Northern and Southern Kingdom, if we like to separate them in this manner, were in fact only sub-divisions of a unit is shown by the complete uniformity in material culture from the most northerly to the most southerly site, ignoring any imaginary boundary we may draw between Bahawalpur and Khairpur, for instance."[2] From this dual administrative system, which has been supposed to have existed at the Indus-valley in Western India, we can well assume that a dual government

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[1] Wheeler—*The Indus Civilisation* (C.H.I.), pp. 2-3.

[2] Piggott—*Prehistoric India* (P.S., 1950), p. 150.

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under a common authority might have administered similarly the Gangetic-valley in Eastern India. This duality of Indian kingdoms also reminds us of the axis of the two Egypts. The two kingdoms of Southern and Northern Egypt and the technique and paraphernalia of the two Lands and the two Governments are well-known, and the interested reader is referred to a very well-written sub-Chapter on "The Kingdoms of the South and North" in the book entitled *The Ancient History of the Near East* by Dr. H. R. Hall. The Greek and Latin narratives of Alexander's invasion of India clearly refer to two Nations and two Governments under a common authority in Eastern India : "After Alexander had reached the Hyphasis, he asked an Indian Chief named Phegeus for information about the country beyond, and was told that beyond the river lay extensive deserts which it would take eleven days to cross. Next came the Ganges, the largest river in all India, the farther bank of which was inhabited by *two nations*, the Gangaridae and the Pharrasii, *whose king*, Agrammes, kept in the field for guarding the approaches to his country 20,000 cavalry and 2,00,000 infantry, besides 2,000 four-horsed chariots, and, what was the most formidable force of all, a troop of 3,000 elephants."[3] It is suggested that Dakshin-dar (the Door of the South) governed the Southern Province and Badin-dar[4] (the Door of the North) governed the Northern Province of a dual-kingdom in Bengal under the common authority of an Emperor-god. These god-heads are the remnants of that forgotten Kingdom.

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[3] Monahan—*The Early History of Bengal* (London, 1925), p. 2.

[4] The word Barendra, the modern name for Northern Bengal, is the corrupt Sanskrit form of the indigenous term Badin-dar which means "the door of the north". Bade or Badiya is a Dravidian word meaning "north" and the Mahomedan historians have correctly recorded North Bengal as Badin-dar.

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PLATE NOTES

1. Drawings

Fig. 1 (page 5) : The goddess Lakshmi is shown standing on a multi-petalled lotus from which two conventionalized lotus stems shoot upwards. The goddess is holding the two stems in her two hands. As such, she is a "Lady on the Lotus" (*Padmabati* or *Kamale-Kamini*). Compare this drawing of the goddess Lakshmi with the figure of an unidentified goddess standing on a lotus leaf or a lotus in between the two conventionally executed lotus stems carved on a steatite seal from Mohenjodaro illustrated in Pl. V at fig. c. These two conventional stems, shooting out from a single root, indicate a "dual nature" of the goddess, *i.e.*, "two in one". She combines "two wings" or "two aspects". She is a "Double" or a "*Ka*". This "double" sign is also found in an *alpana* (fig. 7 at p. 31). Reproduced from a 19th Century wood-engraving.

Fig. 2 (page 16) : One of the many *alpanas*, drawn by the womenfolk of Bengal in connection with the Subachani-*brata*, depicting the royal ducks.

Fig. 3 (page 19) : An *alpana* drawn in connection with the Tara-*brata* depicting a mother-goddess with her seven children. Compare this *linear* drawing with the theriomorphic *plastic* figurines illustrated in Pls. I, II, III, and IV.

Fig. 4 (page 22) : Hat-hor, one of the important animal-headed goddesses of Egypt. Compare similar animal-headed goddesses of Bengal illustrated in Pls. I, II, III, and IV. Cairo Museum, Egypt.

Fig. 5 (page 27) : Lord Ganesa, the theriomorphic god of success, having an elephant's head on a human body. He is closely related to the goddess Lakshmi as her brother. Also refer to the note on Pl. V-fig. b. Reproduced from a 19th Century wood-engraving.

Fig. 6 (page 29) : The king Narmer, the first king of the 1st Dynasty of Egypt, wearing the "Southern Crown" called *het*. Compare the shape of this crown with the shape of the crown worn by the "Door of the South" (Dakshin-dar) of Bengal illustrated in Pl. X at fig. b. Cairo Museum, Egypt. Drawing by B. M. Pathak.

Fig. 7 (page 31) : An *alpana* drawn on a ceremonial wooden seat. The drawing of the gold necklace below the foot-prints indicates that the Kingdom of Bengal was, once upon a time, ruled by the god Set-Ra (Sani). The "double" stems below the necklace obviously signify the "two wings" of the country (*Ka*-land ?), namely, the North and the South. Aim of this *brata* was originally to ensure stability of this "Double House". The

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pictographs below the "double stems" and the "necklace" appear to have possessed great significance. They are the hieroglyphs of the *brata* language. Compare the pictograph of necklace drawn in this *alpana* with the pictograph of necklace shown in the Egyptian drawing illustrated at p. 32.

Fig. 8 (page 32): An Egyptian hieroglyph of "necklace" representing the god Set. Compare similar hieroglyph of "necklace" in the *alpana* illustrated at p. 31. Cairo Museum, Egypt.

Fig. 9 (page 33): A carved pedestal in stone used for mounting the head of Lord Shiva. It is now mistakenly believed as a symbol of the combination of the male and female generative organs of the god Shiva and the goddess Gauri or Parbati. Actually, this is an ideographic pedestal installed to hold the head-figure of Lord Shiva, the Emperor-god. Compare it with the imperial "Double Crown" of Egypt illustrated at p. 35. Also refer to the Shiva-head illustrated in Pl. IX.

Fig. 10 (page 35): Head of an Egyptian Emperor wearing a "Double Crown", the symbol of the two lands, namely, the North and South. The lower part of the crown represents the North and the upper part the South. The form of the Shiva-pedestal (p. 33) evolved from this idea of "double crown". Cairo Museum, Egypt.

Fig. 11 (page 37): An *alpana* of Manasa-*brata*. Note the ornaments illustrated therein.

Fig. 12 (page 43): An *alpana* of Lakshmi-*brata*. The foot-prints on the two sides of the path magically denote the walking in of the goddess towards the place of worship and the pair of foot-prints above the steps indicate her arrival and presence in the house.

Fig. 13 (page 45): An *alpana* of Sezuti-*brata*. There is a treasury building guarded by two *chaukidars* within the walled place. In connection with this *brata* two effigies of a Dom and a Domni (a man and a woman of the Dom community), made of cow-dung, are slaughtered with a dummy knife. This *brata* has its parallel in the ancient Egyptian festival of the "Striking down the Anu". Similarly the Sezuti-*brata* is a Bengali festival of the "Striking down the Dom". *Ref.* Hall—*The Ancient History of the Near East* (London, 1952), p. 96.

Fig. 14 (page 48): Four *Tir-kathis* made of bamboo. These poles signify four corners of the world. Also refer to p. 46-n. Drawing by B. M. Pathak.

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2. Plates

Frontispiece : Part of a scroll painting from Amdabad (Midnapore) depicting the goddess Durga seated on a lotus-seat floating in the ocean. Two conventionalized lotus stems shoot up from a lotus-seat. The seated goddess is shown caressing her elephant-headed son Lord Ganesa. At the right, the disappointed King Salban is also seen on a boat. For the complete story of this *pata* refer to pp. 50-51. The double stemmed lotus-seat has its parallel in the famous seal from Mohenjo-daro illustrated in Pl. V at fig. c. Also compare it with fig. 1 at p. 5. Photo by Ruth Reeves.

Plate I. A theriomorphic terra-cotta figurine from Asadikandi (Assam). Hand-modelled by a refugee traditional potter who migrated to Assam from the District of Pabna in East Bengal. The goddess wears a *mekhala* (skirt). Upper part of her body is open and unveiled. The breasts are uncovered. Strong and stout, she is proudly standing with her children at arms. Compare this bird-headed figurine with the two beak-headed figures depicted in a prehistoric seal of Bengal illustrated in Pl. III at fig. c. Compare this theriomorphic figurine of Bengal with the Egyptian theriomorphic figure illustrated at p. 22. Courtesy Ajit Mookerjee, New Delhi.

Plate II, figs. a, b and c : Theriomorphic terra-cotta figurines from Asadikandi (Assam). Hand-modelled by a refugee traditional potter who migrated to Assam from the District of Pabna in East Bengal. Photo of figs. a and b by A. S. Vaswani and fig. c by D. N. Chaudhury, New Delhi.

Plate III, figs. a and b : Two cat-headed terra-cotta figures of the mother-goddess Shashthi from Panchmura (Bankura). Hand-modelled by traditional potters. Compare these primitive theriomorphic forms of the cat-headed goddess Shashthi with the developed anthropomorphic form of the same goddess illustrated in Pl. IV at fig. b, in which the cat has been shown below as her *vahana*. Photo of the fig. a by Ruth Reeves and fig. b by the Photo Society, Calcutta.

Fig. c : A prehistoric terra-cotta seal unearthed from Harinarayanpur, 24-Parganas, West Bengal, depicting two beak-headed gods. Photo by Krishna Chandra Sarker, C. U.

Fig. d : A terra-cotta figurine from Asadikandi (Assam). Hand-modelled by a refugee traditional potter who migrated to Assam from the District of Pabna in East Bengal. Photo by D. N. Chaudhury, New Delhi.

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Plate IV, fig. a : A beak-headed painted terra-cotta figurine from Narajole (Midnapore). Hand-modelled and painted by a traditional painter. Compare the figurine with the two beak-headed figures depicted in the seal illustrated in Pl. III at fig. c. Photo by the Photo Society, Calcutta.

Fig. b : A painted terra-cotta figurine of the goddess Shashthi from Kalighat, Calcutta. Cast and painted by a traditional painter. Photo by the Photo Society, Calcutta.

Fig. c : An anthropomorphic ritual basket (*jhapi*) symbolizes the goddess Lakshmi, Baripada (Mayurbhanj). The head of the goddess is modelled in clay and added to the basket on which the figure of Lord Ganesa has also been painted. Close relation between Lord Ganesa and the goddess Lakshmi (brother and sister) as shown in this basket is to be noted. Compare this painted ritual basket with the picture illustrated in Pl. V at fig. b. Photo by A. S. Vaswani, New Delhi.

Plate V, fig. a : A painted terra-cotta ritual plate (*sara*) from Dhaka (Dacca). Made and painted by a traditional potter. Photo by B. P. Samanta.

Fig. b : This is a modern tri-colour print from a painting by a non-traditional artist trained in the European technics. It has been included here, because this picture displays a clear version of the mythological definitions of the goddess Lakshmi and her brother Lord Ganesa, as well as the traditional relation that exists between them. We may call this picture a "historical, geographical and cultural chart" of ancient Bengal. In the background, on the horizon, there are the Himalayas, wherefrom the river Ganges is flowing down. At the lower end of the river, the goddess Lakshmi is standing on a lotus. She is the goddess of the fertile delta. From one of her hands gold coins are falling down into a cup. Obviously, the cup belongs to her brother Lord Ganesa who is sitting near by on a throne placed over the steps leading to the bank of the sea. He is a port-god, the "Prince of Elephantine" (Hastinapura ?).

Fig. c : A steatite seal from Mohenjo-daro depicting a goddess standing on a lotus-seat from which two conventionalized stems shoot upwards. Compare this lotus design with the similar lotus designs illustrated in the Frontispiece and in Fig. 1 at p. 5. *C.* 3000 B.C.

Plate VI. A painted terra-cotta ritual plate (*sara*) from Dhaka. Photo by Ruth Reeves.

Plate VII. A traditional painting from Puri, Orissa, depicting a human-headed animal (*Kamadhenu*).

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Plate VIII. A terra-cotta winged and human-headed cow (*Kamadhenu*) from Kasapet (Madras), South India.

Plate IX. A *puja*-head of Lord Shiva in clay from Nabadwip. On the head, there is a corrugated golden helmet. Over the helmet, in the centre, is a "union" symbol of the Emperor-god. As the "union" symbol has already been made on the helmet, it does not require to be placed on a *Linga*-stand. The heads, not having this symbol at their tops, must be placed on the *Linga*-pedestals. A *Linga-patta* is never worshipped alone in India. Without a head it does not purport any meaning—it remains then incomplete. Photo by Krishna Chandra Sarker, C. U.

Plate X, fig. a : A terra-cotta head of the "Door of the South" from 24-Parganas. Made and painted by a traditional potter. Photo by Ruth Reeves.

Fig. b : A terra-cotta head of the "Door of the South" from Jaynagar-Mazilpur, 24-Parganas. Cast and painted by a traditional toy-maker following the *Chitrakara*-tradition. Compare the tall "Southern Crown" with the "Southern" Egyptian "Crown" of 3200 B.C. illustrated at page 29. Photo by Prithvis Neogy.

Fig. c : A terra-cotta head of the "Door of the South" from Panchmura (Bankura). Made by a traditional potter for the use of the tribal people living in that region. It displays the most primitive form of the "Door of the South" who is locally called *Bara-thakur*. Photo by Prithvis Neogy.

Fig. d : A theriomorphic terra-cotta vase from Mohenjo-daro. Date : 3000 B.C. ?

Plate XI. A brass image of the goddess Sitala from Nutanbazar, Chitpur (Calcutta). Photo by A. S. Vaswani.

Plate XII, figs. a and b : Terra-cotta Serpent-vases from Rajgram, Bankura. Wheeled and hand-modelled by the traditional potters. In the vase illustrated at fig. b, the serpents have been given more prominence, but in the vase illustrated at fig. a, the human figure has also been given importance equal to the serpents. Note the golden necklaces below the hoods. Photo of the fig. a by Prithvis Neogy and fig. b by Ruth Reeves.

Plate XIII, fig. a : A pottery-image of the goddess Manasa from Panchmura, Bankura. In this vase the human head has been given more importance over the snakes. The golden necklace has also been shown prominently. It is made of two parts : (1) the rounded pot, and (2) the cup-shaped

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stand. This has been done to give the pot a round shape. The rounded pot serves as an ideograph for the femininity of the ruler-goddess Manasa. Photo by Ruth Reeves.

Fig. b : A pottery-figure of the goddess Kali in brass from Chandanpur, Midnapore. Made by the traditional metal-workers. Note the rounded bottom of the head which indicates the femininity of the ruler-goddess Kali. Photo by the Photo Society, Calcutta.

Plate XIV. A painted pottery-image of the goddess Manasa from Taleswar, Khulna. Made and painted by a traditional potter. The goddess is shown holding two snakes in her two hands. The golden necklace has been drawn prominently. Note the "egg-shaped" ideographic bottom. Photo by Ruth Reeves.

Plate XV. A three-tiered ornamental image of the goddess Manasa from Panchmura, Bankura. The image is called *jhad*. The whole structure is formed over a pedestal made in the shape of a boat. The ruler-goddess Manasa is always associated with the story of a "voyage". The boat at the bottom thus commemorates her "voyage". Note the heavy golden necklace hanging from her neck. At the top tier within the arch, Lord Kartikeya adorned with a "golden necklace", is sitting on a peacock-throne. Did both of them and their cults belong to the North ? Photo by Ruth Reeves.

Plate XVI. A *jhad* made of *sola* (pith) from Gauripur (Assam) depicting the goddess Manasa seated on a throne. Note the boat painted on the lower panel. Photo by D. N. Chaudhury, New Delhi.

Plate XVII, fig. a : Details of Pl. XVI.

Fig. b : Details of Pl. XVI. A pair of anthropomorphic birds are resting in the "Lotus-lake". They are the ancestor-birds of the Bengalis to which Manasa politically demands her affiliation. Bengalis, it is said, are born of birds.

Plate XVIII : A *puja*-image of the goddess Manasa, made of clay, from Malda. Photo by the author.

Plate XIX : The goddess Durga killing the Buffalo-demon. Reproduced from an old 19th Century engraving.

Plate XX, fig. a : The bird-king Jatayu is attempting to swallow up Ravana stealing Sita in his chariot. Part of a scroll painting done by a *samajik-patua* from Midnapore. Photo by Krishna Chandra Sarker, C. U.

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Fig. b : Part of a scroll painting from Narajole, Midnapore, depicting the nativity of Lord Krishna. Painted by a *samajik-patua*. Photo by Krishna Chandra Sarker, C. U.

Plate XXI, fig. a : Part of a scroll painting from Amdabad, Midnapore, depicting the merchant Dhanapati who is announcing the miracle which he had seen in the sea, by beating the royal drum at the palace of the King Salban. Painted by a *samajik-patua*. Photo by B. P. Samanta.

Fig. b : The court scene of Zama, the god of death. The god is attended by his two courtezans and two dreadful messengers of death. Part of a scroll painting by a *samajik-patua* from Birbhum. Photo by Krishna Chandra Sarker, C. U.

Plate XXII. A *paralaukik* painting from Binpur, Midnapore, depicting a Bhumij woman in the Afterworld. Early 20th Century. Painted by a Jadu-*patua*. Courtesy Ajit Mookerjee, New Delhi.

Plate XXIII, fig. a : A *paralaukik* painting by a Jadu-*patua* from Binpur, Midnapore, depicting a Bhumij woman in the Afterworld. Early 20th Century. Photo by Krishna Chandra Sarker, C. U.

Fig. b : Punishment scenes from a Zama-*pata* painted by a *samajik-patua* from Midnapore. At the right lower corner, a pious lady is shown being carried to heaven by an agent of Zama on his head. Early 20th Century. Photo by B. P. Samanta.

Fig. c : *Pisacha*, the wicked demi-god, who is responsible for the deaths of the Bhumijs and the Santals. Painted by a Jadu-*patua* from Dhalbhumgar, Bihar. Early 20th Century. Photo by Krishna Chandra Sarker, C. U.

Plate XXIV. A *paralaukik* painting by a Jadu-*patua* from Binpur, Midnapore, depicting a Bhumij woman in the Afterworld attended by two maid-servants. Photo by Ruth Reeves.

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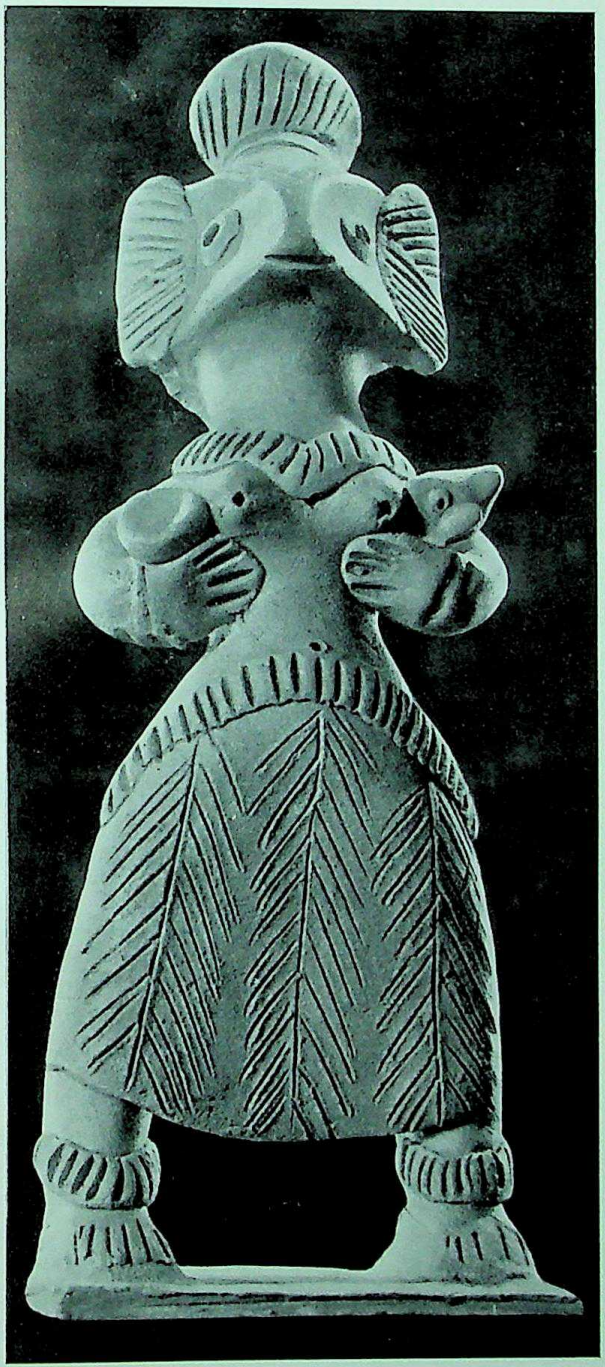

Plate I

A theriomorphic female figurine in terra-cotta from Asadikandi (Goalpara). Courtesy—Ajit Mookerjee, Calcutta. Ht. 10".

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Plate II

Fig. a : A theriomorphic female figurine in terra-cotta from Asadikandi.

Fig. b: A theriomorphic female figurine in terra-cotta from Asadikandi.

Fig. c : A terra-cotta figure of "Mother and Child" from Asadikandi (Goalpara).

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Fig. a : A cat-headed terra-cotta female figurine from Panchmura (Bankura). Courtesy—Ruth Reeves, Columbia University, U.S.A.

Fig. (b : A cat-headed terra-cotta female figurine from Panchmura Bankura). Courtesy—Crafts Museum, I.I.A.I., Calcutta. Ht. 6½".

Fig. c : A prehistoric terra-cotta seal unearthed from Harinarayanpur (24-Parganas). Courtesy—Asutosh Museum. Dia. 9/10".

Fig. d : A terra-cotta figure of "Mother and Child" from Asadikandi (Goalpara). Courtesy—Nilima Barua. Ht. 2½".

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Plate IV

Fig. a : (Left) A painted theriomorphic female figurine in terra-cotta from Narajole (Midnapore). Courtesy—Crafts Museum, I. I. A. I., Calcutta. Ht. 6″.

Fig. b : (Right) A painted terra-cotta figurine representing the goddess Shashthi. Kalighat (Calcutta). Courtesy—Crafts Museum, I. I. A. I., Calcutta. Ht. 7½″.

Fig. c : (Below) An anthropomorphic ritual basket *(jhapi)* from Baripada (Mayurbhanj). Author's collection. Ht. 4″.

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Plate V

Fig. a : A painted terra-cotta ritual plate (*sara*) from Dhaka. Courtesy—Dwarikanath Chatterjee, Ballyganj, Calcutta. Dia. 14".

Fig. b : (Left)
A modern printed picture depicting relations between the goddess Lakshmi and the god Ganesa.

Fig. c : (Right)
A seal from Mohenjo-daro. Courtesy—Department of Archaeology, Govt. of India, New Delhi.

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Plate VI

A painted terra-cotta ritual plate *(sara)* from Dhaka. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Dia. 14″.

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Plate VII

A ritual painting (*pata*) from Puri (Orissa) depicting a human-headed animal. Author's collection. (Now with I.I.A.I.). Dia. 15".

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Plate VIII

A terra-cotta figure of the celestial cow *Kamadhenu* from Kasapet (Madras), South India. Author's collection. Ht. 30″.

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Plate IX

A painted earthen head of Lord Shiva Courtesy— Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Ht. 6½".

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Plate X

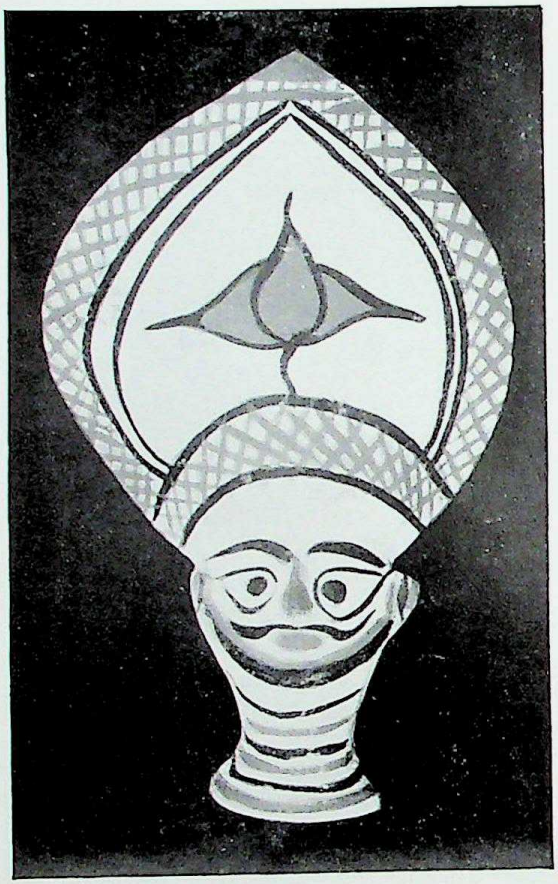

Fig. a : A painted terra-cotta head of Dakshin-dar from 24-Parganas. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum. Ht. 12″.

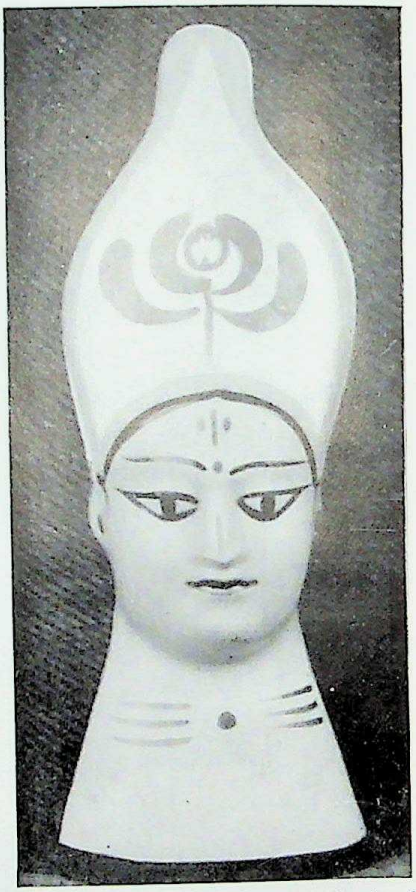

Fig. b : A painted terra-cotta head of Dakshin-dar from Jaynagar-Majilpur. Courtesy – Asutosh Museum. Ht. 6″.

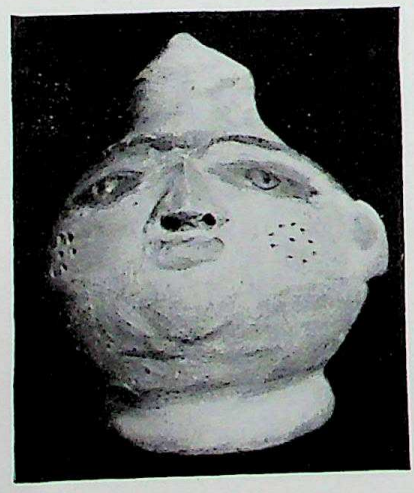

Fig. c : A terra-cotta head of Dakshin-dar from Panchmura (Bankura). Courtesy – Prithvis Neogy.

Fig. d : A theriomorphic earthen vase from Mohenjo-daro. Courtesy – Department of Archaeology, Govt. of Pakistan.

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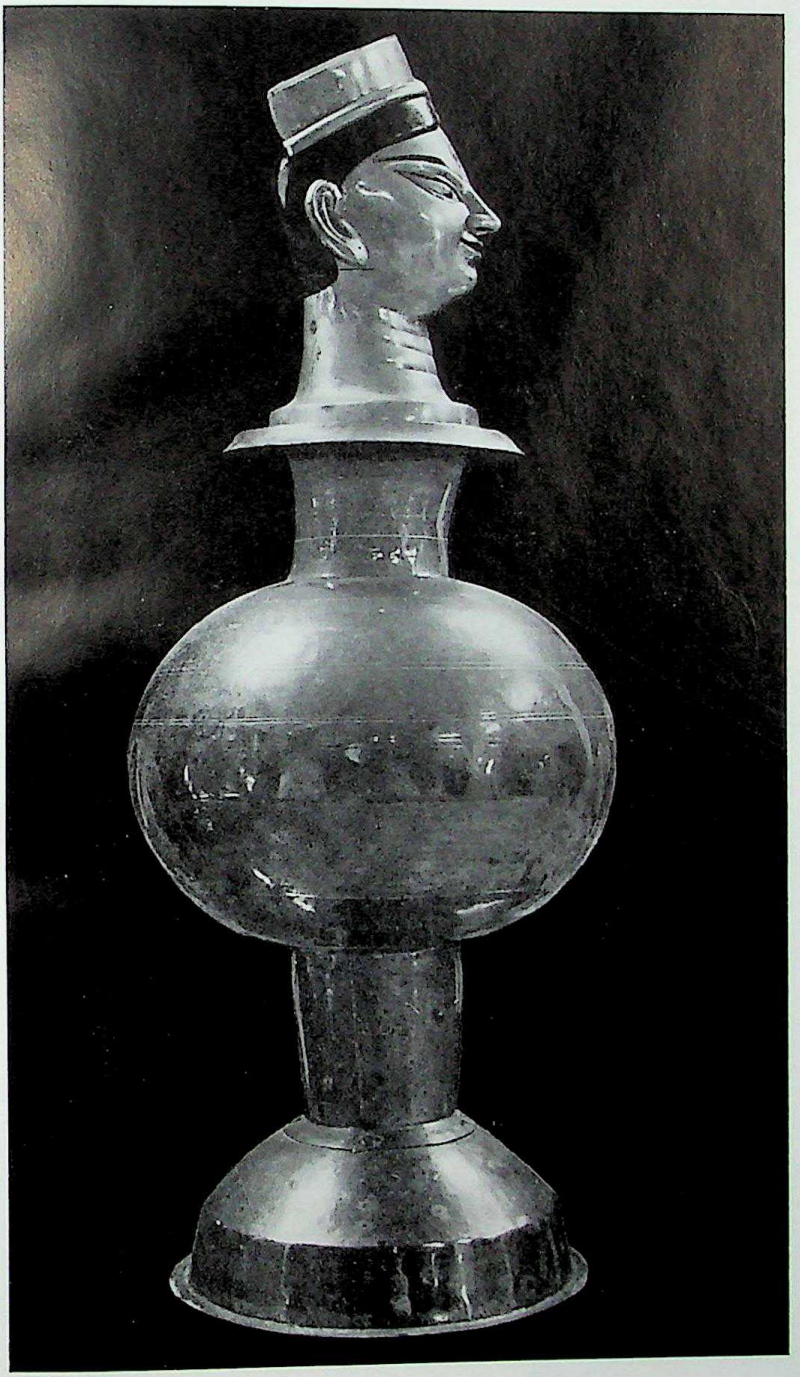

Plate XI

A pottery-image of the goddess Sitala in brass from Chitpur (Calcutta). Courtesy—Crafts Museum, I. I. A. I., Calcutta. Ht. 25".

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Plate XII

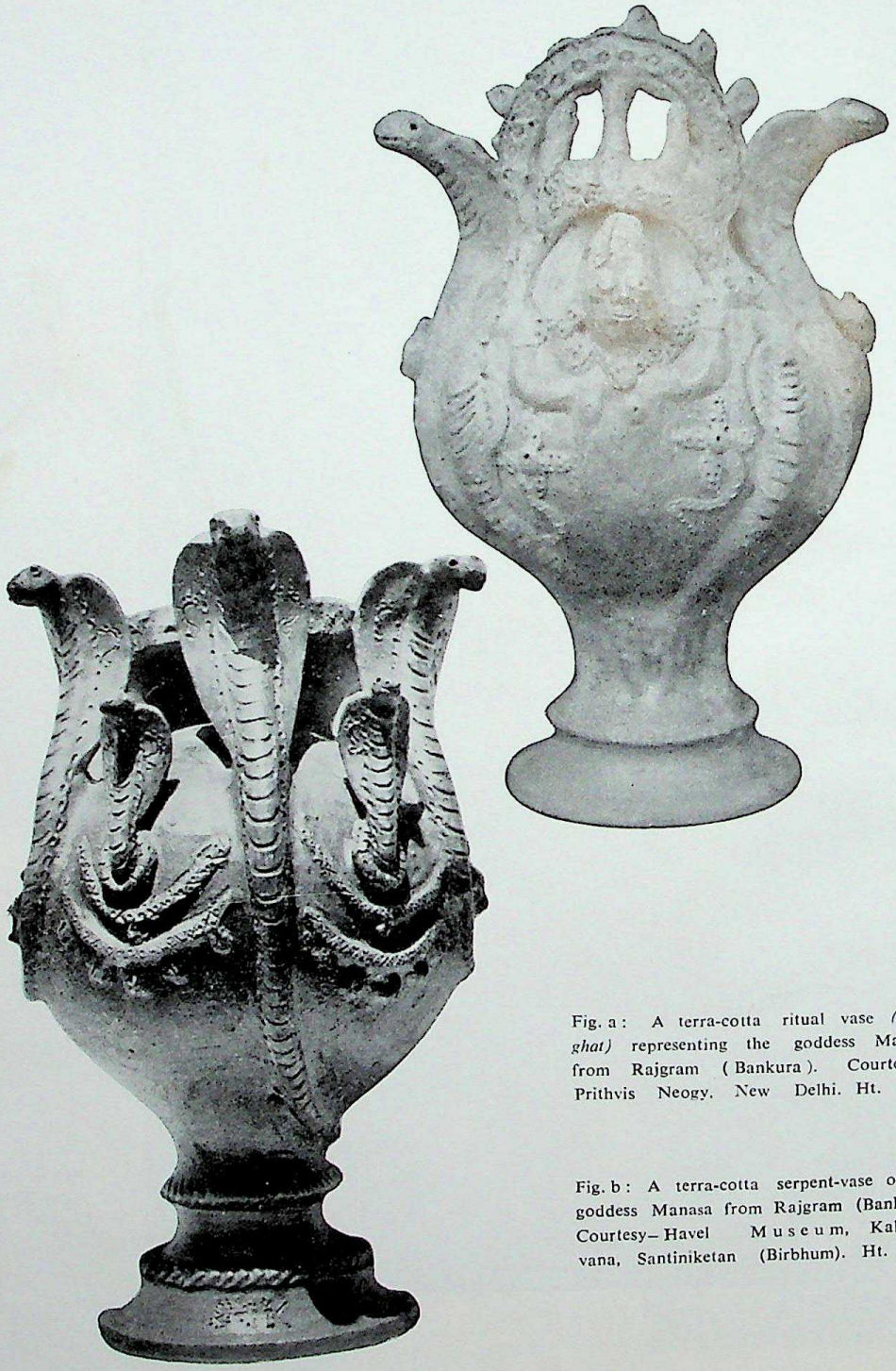

Fig. a : A terra-cotta ritual vase *(bari-ghat)* representing the goddess Manasa from Rajgram (Bankura). Courtesy— Prithvis Neogy. New Delhi. Ht. 16″.

Fig. b : A terra-cotta serpent-vase of the goddess Manasa from Rajgram (Bankura). Courtesy– Havel Museum, Kalabhavana, Santiniketan (Birbhum). Ht. 16″.

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Fig. a : A terra-cotta ritual vase *(bari-ghat)* of the goddess Manasa from Panchmura (Bankura). Courtesy—Ranjit Ghosh, I.A.S. Ht. 17".

Fig. b : A pottery-image of the goddess Kali in brass from Chandanpur. Courtesy—Department of Industries, Government of West Bengal. Ht. 18".

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Plate XIV

A painted pottery-image of the goddess Manasa from Taleswar (Khulna). Courtesy— Asutosh Museum University of Calcutta. Ht. 24".

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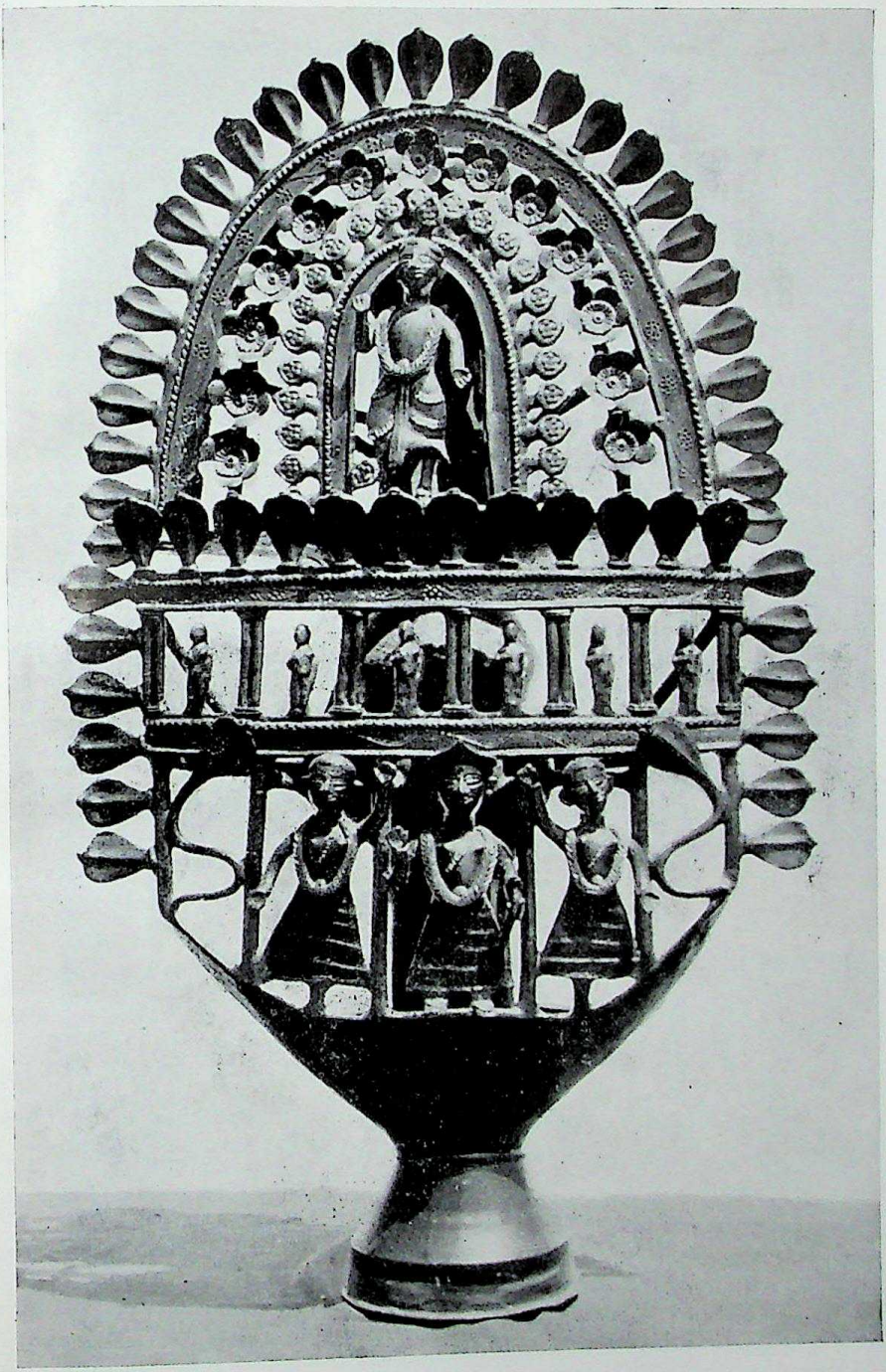

Plate XV

A terra-cotta *jhad* (illuminated temple) of the goddess Manasa from Panchmura (Bankura). Courtesy—Ranjit Ghosh, I.A.S. Ht. 32".

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Plate XVI

A *jhad* (illuminated temple) in *sola* (pith) depicting the goddess Manasa seated on a throne. Gauripur (Goalpara). Courtesy—Nilima Barua.

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Plate XVII

Fig. a : Details of Plate XVI. The goddess Manasa seated on a throne.

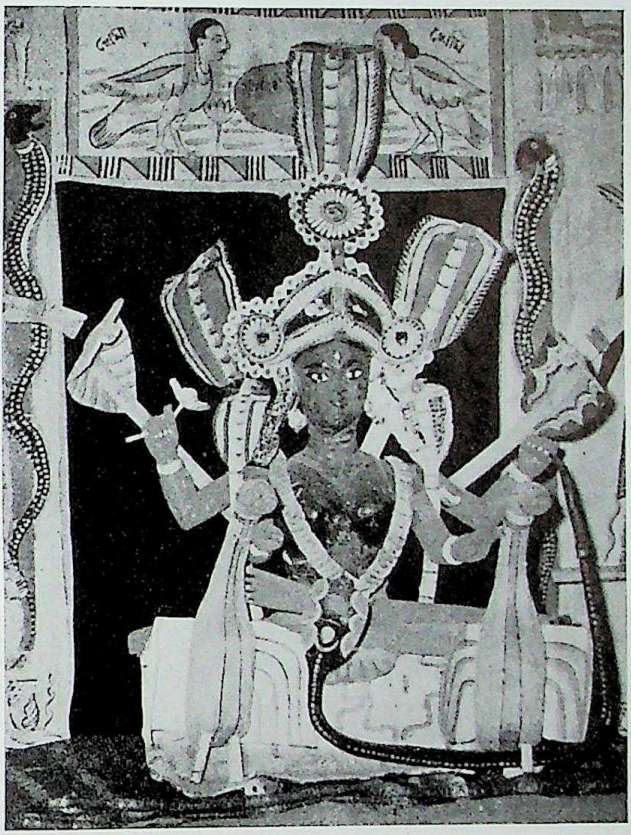

Fig. b : Details of Plate XVI. The ancestor-birds Khema and Khemi.

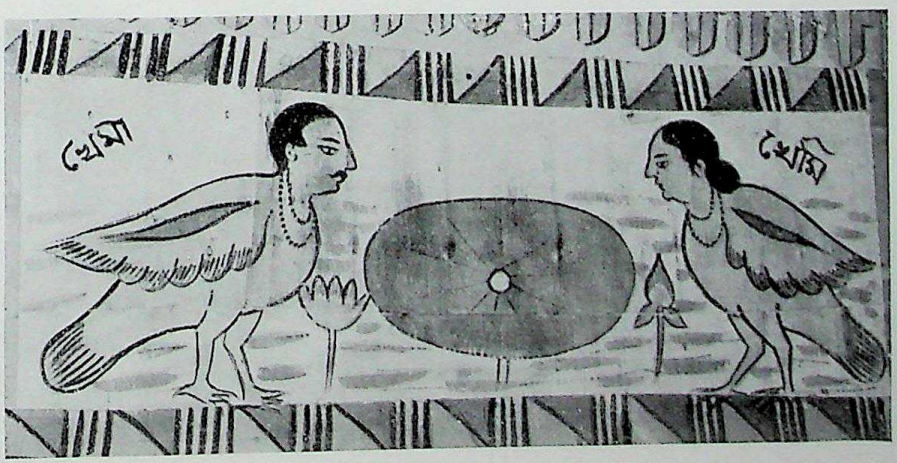

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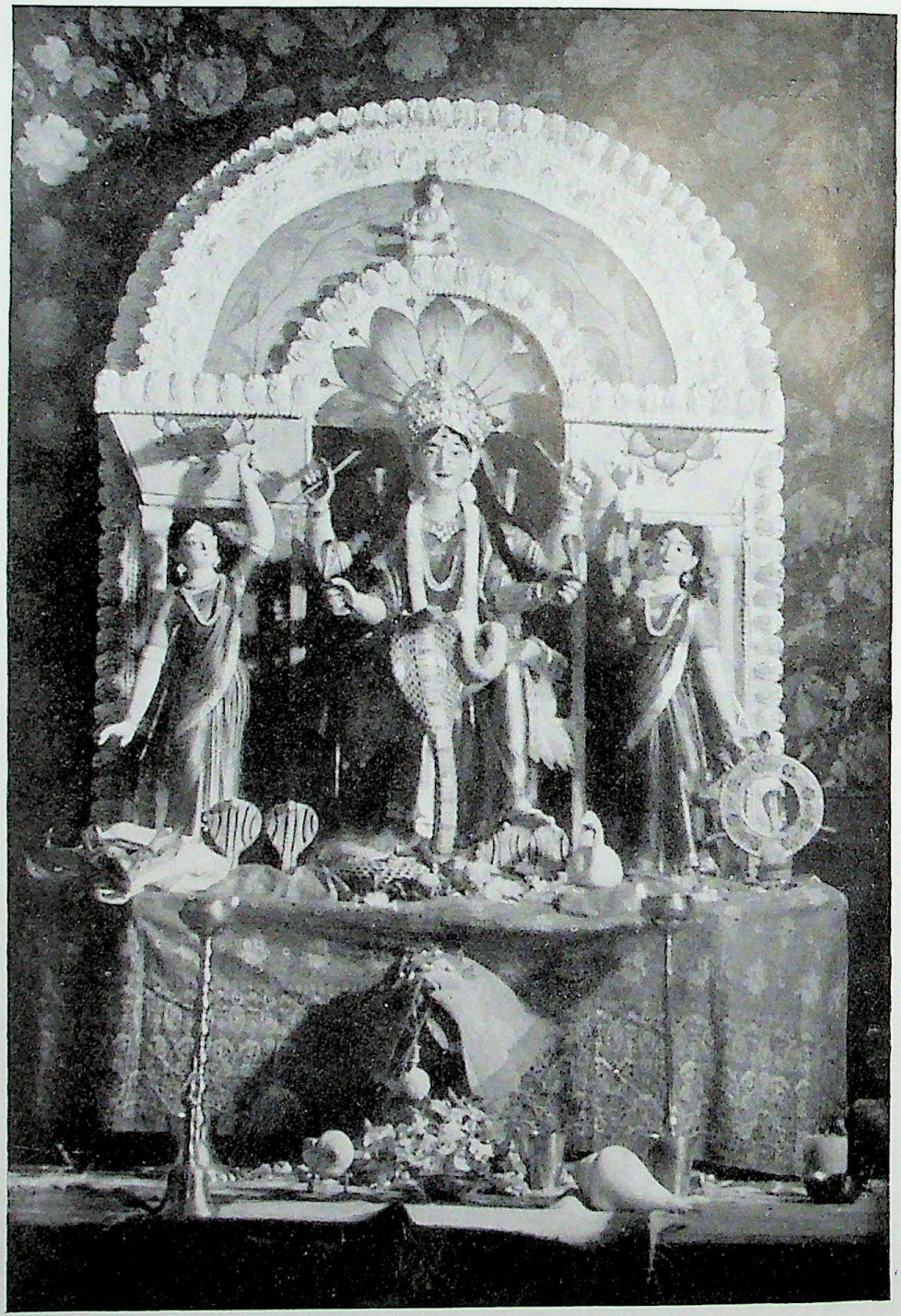
Plate XVIII



A *puja*-image of the goddess Manasa, made in clay, from Malda town (North Bengal).

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The goddess Durga killing the Buffalo-demon. After *Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Calcutta), 1939.

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Plate XX

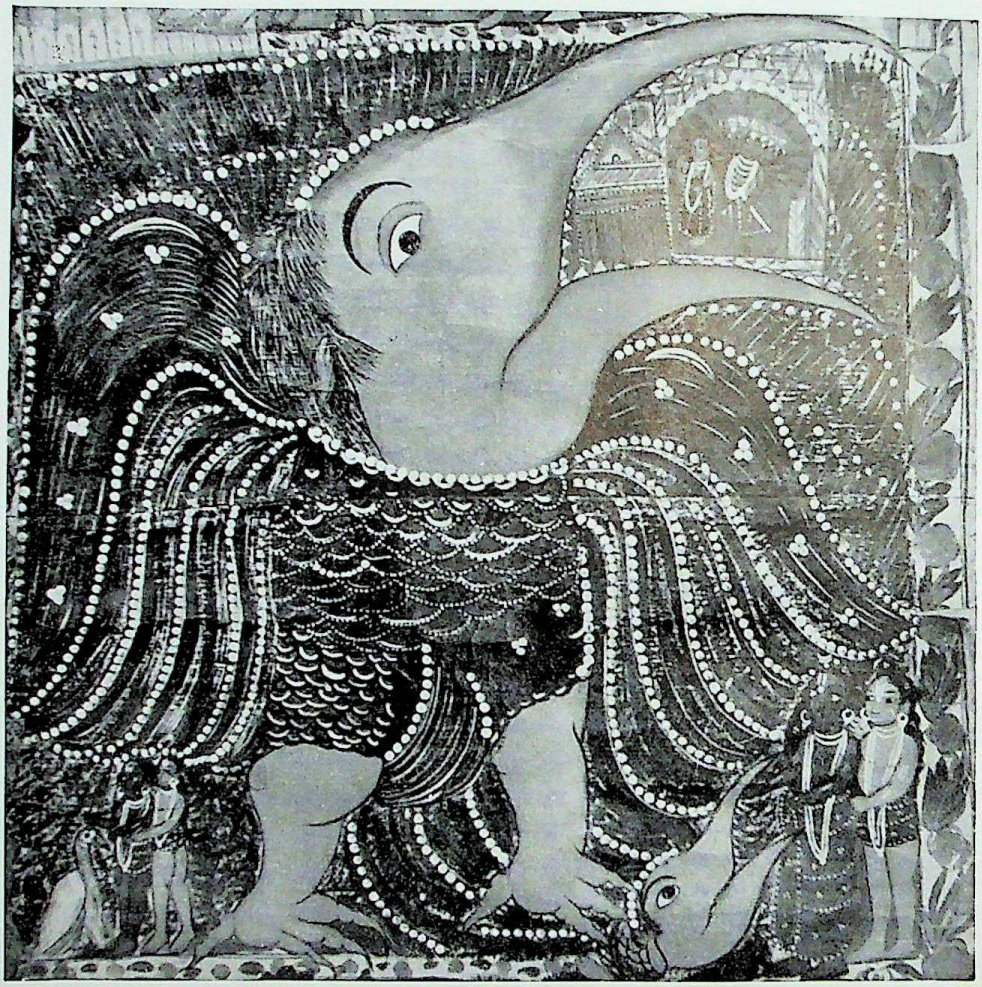

Fig. a : Part of a scroll painting (late 19th Century) from Midnapore depicting a scene from Ramayana. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Size 24″ ×24″ app.

Fig. b : Part of a scroll painting (late 19th Century) from Midnapore, depicting a scene from the legends of Krishna. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Size 24″ × 8″.

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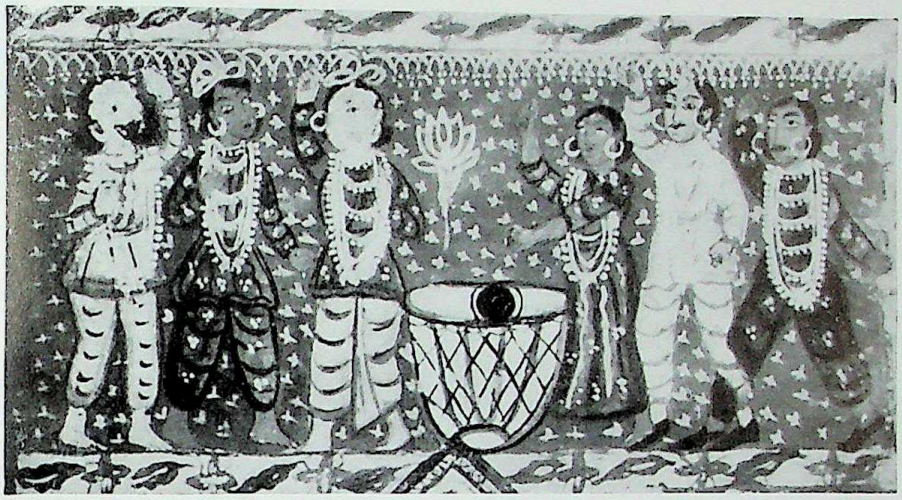

Fig. a : Part of a scroll painting (late 19th Century) from Midnapore depicting the legends of the King Salban. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Size 24″ × 12″.

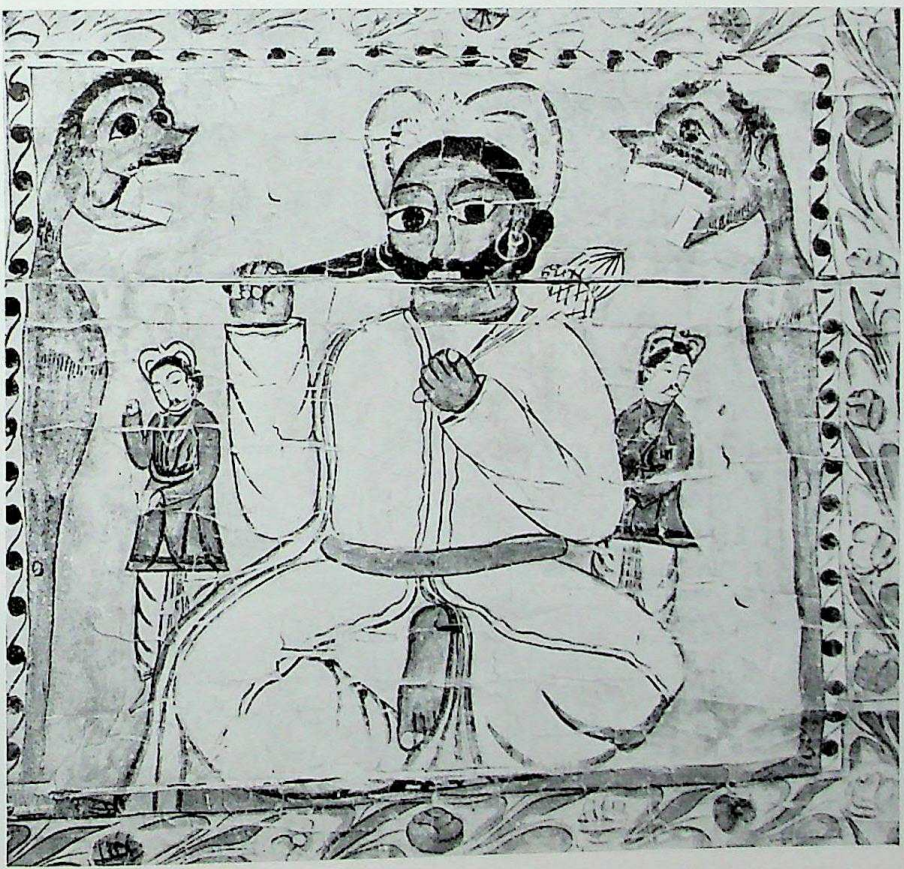

Fig. b : Part of a scroll painting (late 19th Century) from Birbhum depicting the court scene of Zama. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Size 24″ × 22″.

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Plate XXII

A *paralaukik* painting by a Jadu-*patua* from Binpur (Midnapore) depicting a Bhumij woman in the After-world. Courtesy—Ajit Mookerjee. Size 12″ × 8″.

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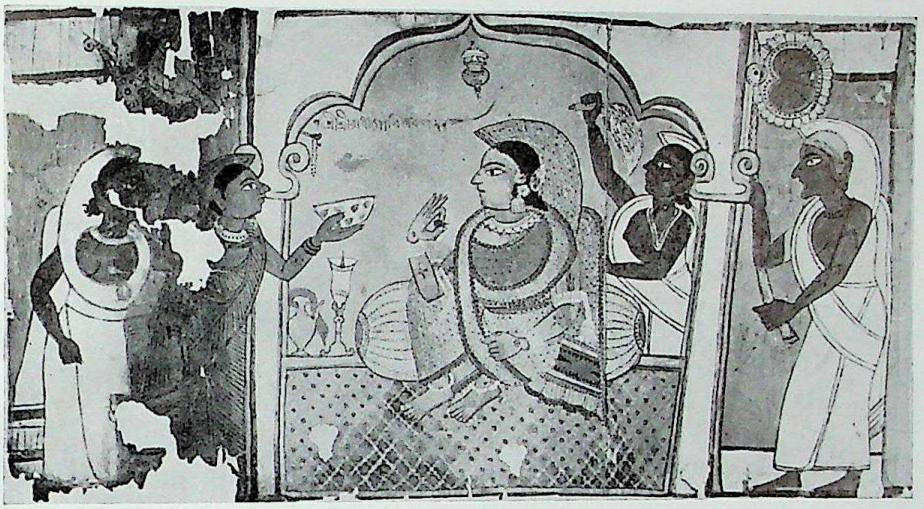

Fig. a : A *paralaukik* painting by a Jadu-*patua* from Binpur (Midnapore) depicting a Bhumij woman in the Afterworld. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Size 31″ × 18″.

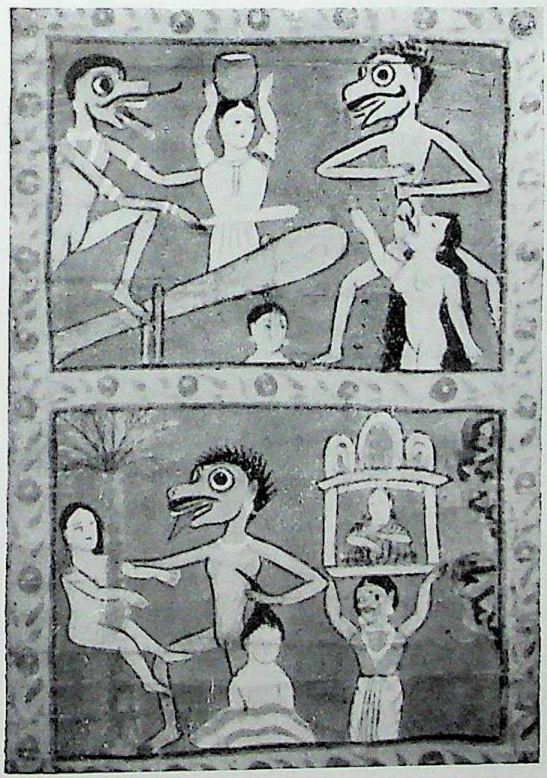

Fig. b : A punishment scene from a Zama-*pata* collected from Birbhum. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum. Size 24″ × 32″.

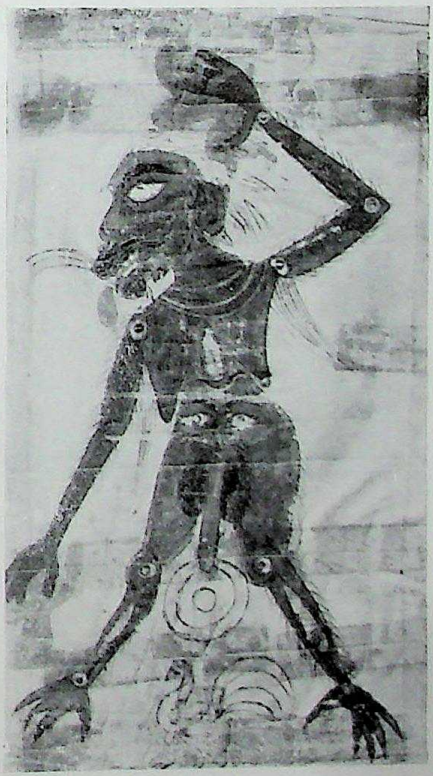

Fig. c : The *pisacha*. Dhalbhumgar (Bihar). Courtesy — Asutosh Museum. Size 9″ × 5″.

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Plate XXIV

A *paralaukik* painting by a Jadu-*patua* from Binpur (Midnapore) depicting a Bhumij woman in the Afterworld. Courtesy—Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta. Size 21″ × 18″.

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O P I N I O N S

Lady R. G. Casey of Australia : Thank you so much for your letter of February 15th and the most interesting proofs you enclosed, which I am now returning to you. The book on the **Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal** should be of great interest and value.

Mrs. Ruth Reeves ; formerly of the Columbia University, New York : I was honoured by Mr. S. K. Ray in that I was the first person he asked to read his preliminary draft of the **Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal**. Immediately I knew that in this book he had cut new paths in a scientific-cum-aesthetic approach to the study of what he calls **Craftology**.

Dr. I.E.S. Edwards ; Keeper, Egyptian Antiquities, British Museum, London : I am writing to thank you most warmly for your kindness in sending me a copy of your forthcoming publication the **Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal**. ...it is full of interest and information. I offer you my congratulations.

Shri A. Mitra, I.C.S., Registrar General of India : I have just had the privilege of reading through the proofs of Shri Sudhansu Kumar Ray's book the **Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal**. I am very glad to find that Shri Ray, as in all previous works, has brought to bear his profound knowledge of Bengal on his learning. His ability to connect into a coherent statement apparently unrelated traditions is outstanding. He has also showed rare understanding in the way he has selected and arranged his plates to prove his thesis. These plates themselves are a document of great merit and insight.

Shri Ajit Mookerjee, Director, Crafts Museum, New Delhi : Shri S. K. Ray's book on the **Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal** will not only make a signal contribution to the understanding of the folk arts and crafts of the country but reveal for the first time the inner meaning of the objects of this particular area, linking the cultural patterns both geographically and ethnologically.

Dr. P. Banerjee, M.A., Ph.D., Suptd. of Publications, National Museum, New Delhi : I have read with delight the **Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal** by Shri S. K. Ray. It is based on an extensive and a critical study of the Brata-literature, archaeological sources and the associated arts and crafts. I have been impressed by his command of the sources and the confidence with which he uses them. The book throughout shows an independent thinking and originality. Its chief merit lies in the intelligent correlation of literary and objective evidence. I have no hesitation in saying that it will greatly enrich our knowledge of the ancient traditions of arts and crafts about which very little has been written uptill now.

Shri Atul Chandra Patra, Advocate, Supreme Court of India : The Jungal Muhals later forming the modern district of Bankura had their distinctive art and civilisation. Shri Ray in his **Ritual Art of the Bratas of Bengal** has presented a part of that ancient civilisation to the world *durbar*. The people of Bankura feel gratified at Shri Ray's achievement.